

MORDECAI RICHLER

A STUDY  
OF  
MORDECAI RICHLER

By  
CLIVE LAURENCE COCKERTON, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Clive Laurence Cockerton, B.A. (University of Toronto)

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## INTRODUCTION

The content of Mordecai Richler's novels has an intriguing consistency. His chief concern is the problem of value in a time of shifting alliances and weakened tradition. From The Acrobats to St. Urbain's Horseman, Richler remains curious as to how his characters seek to understand, explain, and motivate their own lives. Such a curiosity naturally leads him to an exploration of current myths, ideologies and personal preferences. And, as a primarily intellectual novelist, Richler exercises critical judgment on various points of view.

While Richler holds to his own moral criteria in a sometimes ruthless fashion, and while he never suffers fools or hypocrites gladly, a certain generosity of spirit rises to the surface of the fiction. Drawn dangerously close to despair in works as different in style and tone from each other as The Acrobats and Cocksure, Richler nevertheless strives to affirm that human life is valuable in itself. Critical of fallacious ideology, and skeptical about confident solutions, Richler insists on the need for human sympathy. It is his sympathy that is the source of the concluding comic movement in the novels. This constant and curious quality of affirmation after so much usually critical attack becomes a Richler signature that

is signed more confidently and successfully as he matures towards the marvellously comic St. Urbain's Horseman.

If Richler consistently combines a keen interest in morality with an attempt at affirmation, this does not suggest a dreary sameness in each succeeding work. The settings shift from Spain to Montreal and London, while the protagonists differ as widely as the painfully self-aware André Bennett in The Acrobats to the eager, aggressive hustler in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. More importantly, however, there occurs, midway in Richler's productive life, a major alteration in style, tone and attitude. Briefly, the alteration involves a shift from the romance and realism of the early work to the comedy and fantasy of the later work.

Richler begins his literary career with a relatively melodramatic story about a young artist's search for meaning and fulfillment. It is full of the conventional anguishes of the 1950's, and outlines the struggles against meaninglessness of a generation for the first time living under the shadow of The Bomb. Subsequent generations, more jaded perhaps, have learned to live under the shadow, and more than willingly accept the benefits of that other technological triumph, the Pill. At any rate, it is surprising that Richler takes André as seriously as he does, for in later works he was to deal



with similar mock-existentialism with a devastating satire. But since Richler does take André seriously, The Acrobats is the most romantic of Richler's work, full of earnest, if adolescent inquiry, totally lacking in the stance of critical detachment that was to become so much a Richler trait.

As one would expect of a largely autobiographical novel, Richler's next work, Son of a Smaller Hero, is similarly lacking in detachment. Son of a Smaller Hero follows the attempts of Noah Adler to escape the small and restricted vision of his family. In this novel of generational conflict, Noah battles against tradition and authority armed with the only weapon at his disposal, a ruthless honesty. Richler settles on a basically realistic mode to tell his tale, and because of the accuracy of physical detail and the vividness of the portrayal of many minor characters, a lively sense of Montreal, or at least the St. Urbain area, is established. Similar to The Acrobats in romantic seriousness, Son of a Smaller Hero offers a significant departure from the earlier work in its marvellous flashes of humour and wit. It is this wit that surfaces again in the more mature work, and establishes Richler as primarily a writer of comedy.

But first Richler must conclude his early phase with A Choice of Enemies. A sombre study of disillusion,

specifically the disillusion with politics, felt in the late 1950's, A Choice of Enemies is Richler's last strictly realistic novel. The stress in this novel falls on the limited possibilities of human endeavour, and, as such, the novel reveals Richler to be a somewhat conservative critic. The protagonist, Norman Price, expresses an interest in Dryden, and, as vague as the connection may first appear, it seems that Richler himself wishes to go back past the nineteenth century inheritance of romantic concerns.

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz is Richler's most successful North American novel, and, as such, deals with the acquisitive pursuit of the rugged individualist. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz begins the major alteration in Richler's style and attitude. A departure from the realism of the earlier works, the novel, in its exuberant unfolding of extraordinary events, marks Richler's venture into fantasy. In addition, it is the first novel with such a clear line of demarcation between Richler and the protagonist, which quite naturally sets up an ironic and detached perspective. Previous works have revealed flashes of wit and moments of irony, but The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz is transfused with a consistently ironic spirit. In a novel marked by a wonderfully complicated and life-

like ambiguity of meaning, Richler reveals his own ambivalence as he fluctuates between generosity over Duddy's triumph and criticism of the means with which Duddy has achieved his triumph.

If one can forgive a weak first novel, then The Incomparable Atuk is Richler's only bad book. It is significant only in that it marks an experiment with satire, thus paving the way for the enormously more profound Cocksure. The problem with The Incomparable Atuk, apart from the writing itself, which seems so dull after the magic of The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, is that the novel constitutes little more than a revenge raid on the pompous clique of Toronto literati. Perhaps they have earned Richler's disapproval, but, aside from embarrassing his enemies, little seems to be accomplished with this acutely bitter and personal satire.

With Cocksure, however, Richler returns to major achievement. A brilliant, if black satire, Cocksure recalls the Tory gloom of Dean Swift. Many negative facets of contemporary society are underlined and exposed, including as the main targets the moral and intellectual failure of Marxism, the hopeless promise of post-Freudian sexuality, and the bleak anonymity of the triumph of technology. In many ways an ugly and disturbing book, Cocksure finally calls for simple virtues like compassion

and understanding, and for a modest humanity.

In St. Urbain's Horseman Richler is at the height of his powers. A novel about the relationship of heroism to ordinary life, St. Urbain's Horseman achieves a delicate and shifting balance between the simple grandeur of abstract inspiration and the complex puzzlement of life in the flesh. After Cocksure, which seemed to have purged the world of dreams, Richler turns to a study of heroism with less satiric and more comic eyes. Frequently his novels have chronicled pathetic circumstances, and have travelled dangerously close to despair, only to be finally pulled back into the world of the living with a great strain towards comic denouement. In St. Urbain's Horseman the comic mode has won out; it dominates the novel from beginning to end. Of course, Richler remains skeptical, but it is a true skepticism, with very little trace of the cynicism or blackness of the previous work. Whereas the other novels have attempted to affirm a shaky belief in the value of life, St. Urbain's Horseman is, from the beginning, secure in the knowledge that life is valuable, and celebrates that fact.

Something should be said about the scope and aim of this thesis. It is largely a descriptive work, one that attempts to trace Richler's development in terms of both

tone and idea. Matters of style are mentioned where they seem to significantly alter or reflect Richler's development. In addition, some attention has been paid to the critics, where it seems that their contributions are either particularly helpful or particularly misleading. With the exception of The Incomparable Atuk, which has been omitted for the simple reason that it is a bad book, all the major fiction is considered. And, in order to flesh out the man behind the fiction, a chapter on the collection of essays, Hunting Tigers Under Glass is included.

Richler is a major figure in Canadian literature. Having a keen philosophic sense, he is also able to dramatically represent philosophic problems without rendering them as tracts. He has written two very good novels, and possible one nearly-great novel. Most important of all, he has probed modern life honestly, criticizing its follies and its excesses, while retaining a sympathy and respect for those who must live in it.

CHAPTER I

THE ACROBATS

Perhaps the most interesting fact about Richler's first novel, The Acrobats, is that it contains much of Richler's later philosophic concerns, while containing very little of the mature tone and style. In its figure of exile, in its political disillusion, and in its straining for an affirmative concluding movement, The Acrobats sets up patterns of meaning that will consistently recur in Richler's fiction. Yet there is almost none of the spirit of comedy or the stance of detachment that contribute such a marked controlling influence on the later work. If Richler's career involves an attempt to match his philosophy with an appropriate style, then, in The Acrobats, he seems content to begin stating his position in a patchwork of various styles.

Richler takes his young artist protagonist, André Bennett, very seriously. The son of a wealthy Westmount businessman, he has come to Spain to ease the pain caused by the sordid death of his first love, Ida.

Ida had become pregnant, and in order to spare her parents, she decided to have an abortion. When André does not hear from her, he decides to visit her parents. Richler renders the anguished scene with tremendous power:

I'll never forget the look in the old woman's eyes when she saw me come in. She knew who I was without asking. She showed me into the parlour. Old Mr. Blumberg was seated at the supper table, reading from a prayer book by candlelight. He was old and wizened. He rocked to and fro as he read. He had long side curls that made him look very sorrowful, and he wore a square skull-cap. He looked at me for an instant without saying anything. Suddenly he began to weep. It wasn't the sound of a man crying or even an animal. He looked up at me as if he was afraid that I might whip him. 'Why did you have to do it?' he said. 'Why can't you leave us alone? Haven't you had enough amusement with us? Will you always murder us for your enjoyment? Will you rape my old wife now? Isn't it enough that you have murdered our Ida?' I was terrified! I picked him up bodily from the chair and began to shake him. 'She isn't dead! She isn't dead,' I said, 'I love her. Why don't you let me marry her?' Behind me his wife was shrieking for the neighbors. 'She is dead,' he said. 'She died with your filth inside her. Now will you go? Now will you leave us? Murderer!' I couldn't help it, I just couldn't help it! I hit him. You don't know how an old man can look at you, how - She wouldn't even let me help him up. The neighbors rushed in. And together, they threw me out.

"All I wanted was her death to have some dignity. Was it too much to ask? Why did they all have to take it up and make her a cause?"<sup>1</sup>

André runs to Europe, where his escape becomes transformed into a quest, an existentially anguished search for meaning:

. . . I believe in being good and understanding and being a brother to other men and painting because it is the only thing I



can do half well and perhaps finally it will explain to me what I am looking for.<sup>2</sup>

If both plot and sentiment begin to sound a little trite, perhaps it would be well to suspend overly harsh judgment and to remember that this is a first novel, and that, as a result, the patterned structure and rhetoric are almost necessarily derivative. There is a considerable attempt to write in the style of Joyce:

In Grade Six-B listen now Miss Crankshaw had read Toni from a book which said do not move injured bodies you know until an M.D. arrives yes even if it is raining catsandogs snow burning falla and one fine day she asked me André saying it Anne-dree what please is the capital of Poland O Apoo visiting princess lovely of my dreams and I couldn't answer for I was intent on the hairy thing on her cheek which was color ugly if I feel tomorrow so eight and a quarter years years later on I joked with Collins if you don't like my apples no I never stuffed Miss C oh God no ugly like Father saying that's filthy or Serge hugging me saying don't tell please don't God no but why do you shake my tree not Jean-Paul who was all right when my father says there is no second best in war or business oh stop this ohgoddingno crap you don't believe in it for half a second no you don't (now there is a man standing over me) and Mama saying now still I bet do not leave me ever in the dark not ugly the girl's hair or the sun at O Apoo on the église in French of St. Germain-des-Prés or Toni oh my love I didn't did I mean tell him I was afraid her breasts dipping full (the man is waiting for me to die) why doesn't the sky stay still for one just one second huh but I do not want to die with

my eyes open not closing like Ida in my  
dreams oh.<sup>3</sup>

George Woodcock discerns echoes of tone from Malraux (L'Espoir) and Hemingway (The Sun Also Rises).<sup>4</sup> The Hemingway influence is especially marked, from the setting to the dilemma of the main character. Like Jake Barnes, André is one of the walking wounded. For André too, the nights are the really bad times of thrashing nightmares and impending migraines. The Hemingway cynicism is there:

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.<sup>5</sup>

Hemingway mannerisms abound:

André 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 probably he did not love Toni. 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.<sup>6</sup>

There is also one incredibly close echo of A Farewell to Arms.

Love he thought. That is one of the words that is no longer any good. Like courage, soul, beautiful, honor and so many others. Words that have become almost obscene because of hack writers.<sup>7</sup>

Such derivativeness is of course a weakness in the novel. The reader cannot help but feel that somehow he has read all this before, and in a more skilled version at that.

George Woodcock finds The Acrobats "irrevocably dated, set in a style and a way of thought - those of the early fifties - which today seem even more distant than those of the Thirties."<sup>8</sup> For similar reasons Richler himself finds his first novel to be "too wild, the attitudes aren't real, they are undigested."<sup>9</sup> For example, André declares in a moment of precious insight:

What drives us on, he thought, is the sense that we haven't tried everything. That perhaps somewhere there is God.<sup>10</sup>

It is precisely this kind of absurdist sentimentality that Richler was to satirize unmercifully in his later works, notably Cocksure.

The Acrobats is also somewhat clumsy and forced in its handling of its symbolism. Richler obviously wants the reader to identify André's fate with the fate of the fallas. The fallas, giant dolls of paper maché, are burned at the end of the festival. As a minor character

explains:

"Perhaps in all of us there is some evil, and we're just too weak to burn it. So we build evil toys and dance around them. Later we burn them, hoping, perhaps, that it will help."<sup>11</sup>

As the townspeople enact their purgation ritual the reader is led to connect it with André's purgation and similar end. The reader is told that,

their construction hadn't sprung from the spontaneous mischief of a fiesta-minded city but from the master plan of some diabolical spirit - as if they were not going to be burned but had to be burned.<sup>12</sup>

And of course, Richler is trying to give André's fate an inevitability: he also had to be killed. But somehow the connection is a little too forced, a little too patterned, and self-consciously literary rather than naturally suggesting itself out of the dramatic action, and the reader is disturbed by the almost cute quality of the simultaneous explosion of the fallas and André's painful death.

There is plain bad writing too, as in this description of a Flamenco guitarist:

Eyes of burning coal. Sweat rolling down leather cheeks. Fingers beating on a guitar. Beating, beating, beating. Head in a coma, head in a spell. Fluid body swaying. Twangy guitar sending up a burst of metal song -

¡Fuego! ¡Fuego! ¡Fuego!

.....

Mad guitar raving! Ten joy-crazy  
soulfingers swooping down on the strings  
bonily . . . <sup>13</sup>

But it seems that one could easily exaggerate the novel's weaknesses. After all this is a first novel, and rather than point to imperfection, perhaps the critical emphasis should be on the discovery of new talent. There is much to be admired here. The confrontation scene between André and Ida's parents, previously quoted, is an example of assured and powerful writing. Another less controlled but quite brilliant scene begins with the epistle to the Rio Turia and ends with the prophetic fears of André's lover, Toni.<sup>14</sup> Mood and setting are carefully evoked and in his equally strong and quick characterization of minor figures, particularly Barney and Jessie Larkin, Richler shows promise of the fully realized characters the reader will meet in the later novels.

Like many first novels, The Acrobats is significant in that it presents, in seminal form, many of the themes and situations of later work, thus contributing to a feeling of continuity in the writer's work as a whole. George Woodcock makes some valuable observations in

pointing out recurring patterns in Richler. Abortion, "linked to a false relationship between Jew and Gentile occurs again in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz."<sup>15</sup> Elements of sexual inadequacy add up to a catalogue; Jessie accuses her husband of impotence in The Acrobats; Theo Hall finds it difficult to satisfy his wife Miriam in Son of a Smaller Hero; Joey and Charlie Lawson have a sterile marriage in A Choice of Enemies; Uncle Benjy and his wife cannot produce a child in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz; Mortimer Griffin suffers from an adolescent insecurity about his genitals in Cocksure. While Richler is occasionally exuberant in discussing sex, he is more frequently wary of the fact that an opportunity for joy can equally be a source for pain.

One of Richler's more obvious talents is his ability to create a sense of community, usually consisting of lively minor characters under the domination of a central patriarch. In The Acrobats, Woodcock sees Chaim as a patriarch prefiguring the zeydas of Son of a Smaller Hero and The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz.<sup>16</sup> But as Chaim says:

Before Christ there were two great teachers among the Jews. Hillel and Shamai. One man was composed of love and the other only of justice.<sup>17</sup>

The zeyda of Son of a Smaller Hero leans towards the Shamai model; the zeyda of The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz suggests a mixture of both; Chaim is decidedly all Hillel. It is perhaps interesting to note that the patriarch figure becomes a bit perverse in the rendering of Sonny Winkleman in A Choice of Enemies, while in Cocksure, the ineffectual Lord Woodcock is replaced by the monster-patriarch, Star-Maker.

Physiological weakness and social evil are other facets of Richler's works that are introduced in The Acrobats. André's periodic breakdowns resemble, Woodcock claims, the epileptic condition of Virgil in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, they bring to mind Duddy's occasional "bad" moments, and Norman Price's bouts of amnesia in A Choice of Enemies. Violent death is a pattern initiated by The Acrobats, to be picked up again in Son of a Smaller Hero and A Choice of Enemies, and ultimately to be burlesqued in Cocksure. While private lives are disturbed by death and disease, the public sector is haunted by the ghosts of Naziism. The shadow of Kraus, which lurks through The Acrobats as a potent symbol of Nazi evil, is picked up again in the sordid past of Ernst in A Choice of Enemies, and in the fantastic horrors of the Frankfort efficiency team in

Cocksure. Against this background, the Richler protagonist seeks love as a refuge from his largely negative experience. In love the protagonist is also disappointed, as behind at least five of the novels (The Acrobats, A Choice of Enemies, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, Son of a Smaller Hero, Cocksure) lurks the panic caused by the memory or the process of lost love.

Perhaps Richler's greatest achievement as a Canadian novelist is the intellectual weight that he has brought to bear on the moral issues of our time. His concern with both the first and last questions of philosophy begins in The Acrobats. André Bennett, "without hope or reason or direction"<sup>19</sup> comes face to face with the contemporary conclusion that all gods are dead, all wars are fought, all faiths in men shaken.<sup>20</sup>

Since Gallileo there has been a slow and irregular acceptance of the fact that the universe is indifferent to man's needs, that the metaphors of integration, Man and God, Man and Nature, ignore the facts of separation. The feeling that the universe is not in harmony with man through the intercession of an anthropomorphic deity, provokes man to retreat from cosmological to more private concerns. As problems are individualized their separation from any over-arching structure is inevitable, and man is forced to the, by now banal, conclusion of relativity.



André, in a moment of despair, goes so far as to doubt the existence of anything beyond the quivering subjective:

There was no longer an outer objective world (And perhaps, he thought with sudden delirious vision, there never was.)<sup>21</sup>

But it would be wrong to infer that André's problem is metaphysical. The metaphysical is there surely, but for the most part his concern is a little more rooted in social realities:

Often it appeared to André that he belonged to the last generation of men. A generation not lost and not unfound, but sought after zealously, sought after so that it might stand up and be counted, perjuring itself and humanity, sought after by the propogandists of a faltering revolution and the rear-guard of a dying civilization.<sup>22</sup>

The outworn idealism of "faltering revolution" and the laissez-faire ethics of a "dying civilization" tempt André to veer from the truth of his own experience, but never finally. The propagandists come with their answers, their politics, their money, their sex, but André's aesthetic sense refuses company with the basic ugliness of their inducements. Not finally tempted to exchange truth for over-simplification, André suspects, with Keats, that if there are solutions, they would have to be more graceful than the ones offered. When asked what he is

looking for, André's hesitant answer indicates the importance of aesthetics: "It's something beautiful. . . . When I find it, I'll know."<sup>23</sup>

André does not reject current solutions out of cynicism. He is sure that some manner of solution is waiting to be discovered. For, despite his occasional doubts as to the existence of an objective world, André does affirm his belief that out of the confusion and compromise of his time a synthesis of truth will come, a truth that can freeze the dreary cycle of dialectical disillusion:

There was the truth, a shining beauty of a truth; and if he was strong enough he would find it. But until then, until that never day, his center would be confusion.<sup>24</sup>

André affirms his belief in truth not on the basis of overwhelming evidence, but out of a personally held conviction that hope and truth are necessary for man to live. The last moment of the novel echoes this feeling as Toni asks Chaim if there is any hope. Chaim responds: "There is always hope. Always. There has to be."<sup>25</sup> Without hope there can be no action, and a life without action "would mean non-living, which was the lot of the coward."<sup>26</sup> The dignity and duty of action comes to André at his last moments on the bridge. He and Toni would go

to Canada; he would work at what he knew. André's choice, André's answer was to have been love, but his action was cut short by the symbol of hate, Kraus.

Chaim interprets André's death in an unusual and somewhat disturbing manner:

André was a casualty. Kraus killed him, but not for himself - he was the instrument of us all.<sup>27</sup>

But this kind of deterministic passivity is directly at odds with Chaim's optimism. Optimism is not so passive as to think of André as a mere casualty, a victim of his environment. Optimism believes in values, priorities, choice, in individuals. It is the philosophic accompaniment to action in a world where there are friends and enemies, good and bad. It would seem that Chaim's optimism is irreconcilable with his determinism and that one or the other is wrong. It would seem so, at least logically, but perhaps there is another sense, a more fully dramatic sense, in which this very irreconcilability is right.

At the novel's conclusion, André's mistress, Toni, has a child. The child, named André, obviously carries the symbolic weight of hope. Yet the child's father is André's killer. As G. David Sheps points out:

If the child is meant to be a symbolic reborn André (which is certainly the hope of Toni), he is also ironically the reborn Kraus.<sup>28</sup>

In such a fashion, the novel withholds positive resolution. The symbol of love is inextricably tied to the symbol of hate. Modestly, the novel does not attempt to offer a new solution. This failure or lack of solution, should not be the cause for despair, for the novel insists on the necessity for hope; if not André's hope for a "shining beauty of truth," at least hope as a day-to-day prerequisite for action. If hope seems incongruous in a world so full of pain and death, Chaim might provide the key to Richler's comic explanation:

In fact, you might as well get this through your head now: Nothing is ever resolved, but it's always worth it.<sup>29</sup>

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Mordecai Richler, The Acrobats (London: André Deutsch, 1954), p. 147.

<sup>2</sup>The Acrobats, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>4</sup>George Woodcock, Mordecai Richler, Canadian Writers, No. 6 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 20.

<sup>5</sup>The Acrobats, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 171-2.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 50, Cf. "Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete name of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates." Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (New York: Scribner's, 1929), p. 185.

<sup>8</sup>George Woodcock, Mordecai Richler, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup>Nathan Cohen, "A Conversation with Mordecai Richler," Tamarack Review, No. 2 (Winter 1957), p. 20.

<sup>10</sup>The Acrobats, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 85-6.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-7.

- <sup>15</sup>Woodcock, p. 21.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 21.
- <sup>17</sup>The Acrobats, p. 162.
- <sup>18</sup>Woodcock, p. 22.
- <sup>19</sup>The Acrobats, p. 103.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 32.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 179.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 32.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 24.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 68.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 246.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 68.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 244.
- <sup>28</sup>G. David Sheps, ed. Mordecai Richler, Critical Views on Canadian Writers, No. 6 (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1971) p. xvi.
- <sup>29</sup>The Acrobats, p. 244.

CHAPTER II

SON OF A SMALLER HERO

Son of a Smaller Hero strikes the reader as the usual bildungsroman type of novel. It traces the attempts of its rebellious protagonist, Noah Adler, to overcome the limitations of his cultural and social background. In his portrayal of Noah's search for a true way out of the ghetto, Richler raises the problem of the individual's attempt to find some value in a society which hides behind a false but comforting morality.

The sense of Jewish Montreal as a landscape is one of the achievements of Son of a Smaller Hero. George Woodcock writes that:

the Jewish world is painted with a vivid impasto which suggests the vitality and variety of human impulse that stir beneath a surface stiffened by traditions and fears.<sup>1</sup>

In his desire to give an accurate portrayal of the ghetto, Richler has written his most realistic novel. To be sure there are ironic touches throughout the work, but essentially it is a moral novel by a young and talented artist who takes his world too seriously to satirize it.

As well as being the most realistic of the novels, it belongs to the more romantic phase of Richler's



writing, beginning with The Acrobats and ending with A Choice of Enemies. In all three novels there is an overriding sense of trust in the protagonist, and a resultant hope in the reader that the protagonist will prevail against a lesser and more sordid environment.

The lesser and more sordid environment, in this case, refers to the ghetto, that surface, as Woodcock describes it, "stiffened by traditions and fears." With the exception of Noah, everyone tries to conform. Richler indicates his understanding of this phenomenon of mass subservience by quoting Dostoievski--"If God did not exist, everything would be lawful." This concept serves to remind the reader that behind the rush to law, the compulsion to conform, lies man's great fear of chaos. The isolation and terror of absolute freedom forces man to place between himself and darkness a sense of justice and morality. But the sense of morality too often slips, in reductive fashion, to mere legality, and legality stiffens to form an obstacle to a fully human life.

It is against this reductive process that Noah rebels. Armed with a most noble and perhaps the most adolescent virtue of honesty, Noah becomes a romantic proponent of a way out of hypocrisy. For Noah discovers that every member of his family has one lie, one secret, private rebellion from the public mask of conformity.

Wolf Adler, the smaller hero, dreams of partnership in his father's firm and ticks out his time in the most paltry rebellion, the secret hoarding of personal trivia, recording such details as the number of steps he takes each day, the amount of urine he discharges, and the number of quarrels with his wife. (Average over a twenty-year period - 2.2 quarrels per day), Wolf believes in Reader's Digest, the value of caution in financial matters, and in the importance of being thought likeable by others. Not one to create a stir, Wolf maintains a low profile, content to wait until the contents of Melech's box fall to him. Wolf mistakenly thinks that the box contains money. Of course, it actually contains the painful chart of Melech's youthful affair with Helga, his Gentile mistress. The Jewish-Gentile relationship is a major narrative motif in Richler fiction, and one that usually ends in disaster for one or both parties concerned. Lest anyone think that Richler indirectly aims to discourage such alliances, it would be well to point out that Melech seems to be reduced in his final subservience to convention.

Leah Adler, Noah's mother, clings to the smug assumption that she is superior to her society. The daughter of a self-proclaimed Zaddik (with an endearing if inappropriate penchant for writing poems celebrating

a tranquil nature he had never known), Leah sees Noah as the price of her ransom from the vulgarity of her position as hostage to the Adlers. She feels that somehow she has acted as a medium, transferring her father's "superior" qualities to Noah. The script of her day-dreams sees Noah, after having won fame and glory in the outside world, returning to rescue her from an incredulous Adler family, and from a squalid and mean connection with them through her marriage to Wolf.

The portraits of minor figures in the landscape are realized with a Dickensian facility, and further exhibit the pattern of reduction heading towards emptiness. Max Adler, the wheeler-dealer, pursues his goals of money and political power with a single-minded avengence, similar, in fact, to Duddy's pursuit of property. Max does not share Melech's orthodoxy, but is willing to use group convention to get his own ends. Proud to keep the family in cars, Max looks forward to the day when he can replace Melech as the patriarch.

Shloime, Melech's youngest son, deviates from the social norm through breaches of the orthodox code. He hates his father and only hesitates to publicly reject his father's values out of fear. In such meanness lies the source of his viciousness. Finally, this "end-product of religious fanaticism"<sup>2</sup> finds substance for

his small morality in resistance to the "Commie menace."

Even Panofsky, the Marxist ideologue, often sympathetic and never vicious, seems, at times, to be living with unnecessary futility. For in choosing to wait for the dawning of revolutionary consciousness among the eager hustlers of St. Urbain he chooses an impossible hope.

The Goldenbergs, Leah's brother and his family, are reform Jews who expurgate the vulgarities of the ghetto without substituting any greater vision. In their speeding towards an identity which would allow them to pass unrecognized, the Goldenbergs bear the indelible stamp of the oppressed consciousness, trying their level best to please and imitate their oppressors. Ultimately, in their separate, mean deviations from conformity, they are symbolic as well as literal kin to the Adlers:

He finally realized that the secret of their humanity was that each one had a tiny deviation all his and/or her own. None conformed completely. Marsha, the little bitch, had love being made to her by a McGill quarter-back whilst she was trying to hook Noah. (That finally endeared her to him). His Aunt Rachel obeyed in all things except that she secretly read the most blatantly pornographic literature, and Mrs. Feldman beat her French poodle with a whip. Terror lurked behind their happiness.

In fact, they weren't happy at all: they were composed. Truth was adroitly sidestepped, like a dog's excrement on the footpath.<sup>3</sup>

Noah reaches out beyond the ghetto's borders, to college and a relationship with his professor, Theo Hall. Noah meets Theo at Wellington College, "a benign back water of mediocrity."<sup>4</sup> Theo is the prototype of the teacher as frustrated and mediocre man, a figure to reappear in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. Theo had come to Wellington College to "wrest Montreal from the grasp of the Philistines,"<sup>5</sup> a task for which he is singularly inadequate. His magazine, Direction, was not the success he had hoped for (indeed it was fashionable among his colleagues to refer to it as "No Direction"). His students were not aspiring and grateful disciples, despite Theo's friendly and extra-curricular interest in them.

In addition to his inadequacy as a teacher, Theo serves as the prototype of the sentimental progressive, a figure that reappears in A Choice of Enemies and, in burlesque form, in Cocksure. Richler's keen critical sense jabs mercilessly at Theo's sentimental orthodoxy:

Theo, who, when he goes to heaven, will say: "I didn't believe in God. I didn't kill. I didn't join the Book-of-the-Month Club."<sup>6</sup>

Noah, on the other hand, possesses an intellectual toughness comparable to his eventual emotional ruthlessness, as his summary of Theo's sloppy brand of humanism shows:

He was 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.<sup>7</sup>

This emphasis on the separation of concrete and personal from abstract and generalized values becomes a Richler habit. Noah's recognition of the bankruptcy of Theo's abstraction, however, does not help him in affirming anything concrete and personal. Rather, Noah sees his escape route from the corruption of the ghetto shrink to the barren proportion of Theo's alienation.

Before his separation from the ghetto, Noah had once tried to be a full member. At his local youth group he had tried to identify with the Zionist enthusiasms of the speaker:

We're all of us Jews in this room, he thought. But a voice came back: All Jews and all strangers. He forced the conventional anguishes on himself. Quotas, Cyprus, Eretz, gas chambers. Gritting his teeth, he turned askingly to the speaker, demanding that he too be saved.<sup>8</sup>

But Noah's alien voice comes back, as Richler tells the reader that,

The man, orphaned by a furnace, and swindled by memory, had drained away the innocence of others. From now on explanations, curiosity, intelligence, could be done without. The enemy, so long elusive, had been shaped.<sup>9</sup>

Noah tries to join the dance circle, but each time hangs back from embarrassment, and his half-hearted attempts at membership are rebuffed. For the feeling of belonging demands a corresponding act of commitment, and the welcome of the group is extended only to the enthusiastic.

Noah's dilemma over the dance circle underlines the ambivalence which becomes such a strong theme in Son of a Smaller Hero, and indeed in all of Richler's novels:

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 tradition or a community to which he could relate his experience.<sup>10</sup>

Noah does not find that sense of tradition or community in Wellington College, or in the company of Theo Hall. Nor can Noah seek reunion with his family. As he tries to explain to his Zeyda with an adolescent but sympathetic insistence on honesty:

" . . . 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 . . . you can't go back, Zeyda. It would be easy if you could."<sup>11</sup>

It would be an easier alternative, since Noah is convinced that,

It's not enough to rebel, he thought. To destroy. It is necessary to say yes to something.<sup>12</sup>

But he cannot say yes to his family, his religion or the usual ambitions. For his rejection of the family, he is labelled a traitor and a "nothing".

In the midst of his anguish, Noah finds some solace in art:

The first time Noah had been to a concert the orchestra had played "The Four Seasons of Vivaldi" and he had been so struck by it that he had felt something like pain. He had not suspected that men were capable of such beauty. He had been startled. So he had walked out wondering into the night, not knowing what to make of his discovery. All those stale lies that he had inherited from others, all those cautionary tales, and those other dreadful things, facts, that he had collected like his father did stamps, knowledge, all that passed away, rejected, dwarfed by the entry of beauty into his consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

The awareness of beauty "dost tease us out of thought," if thought is a property of "cautionary tales, and those other



dreadful things, facts." Interrupting the dreariness of Noah's condition, the music renders the ideal concrete, particular and sensual, encouraging Noah in his fundamentally idealist quest for something finer than his experience has proved possible.

But Art for Art's sake fails to supply all human needs, and Noah turns to love, to Miriam Hall, the other half of the ostensibly model couple. Raised in a poor and unstable environment, frustrated after a long parade of sexual wanderings, Miriam found in Theo, if not passion, an opportunity to establish a stable sense of position. But a sense of position is a fixed position and in itself unfulfilling, and Miriam, the deprived woman, turns to the romance of an affair with Noah. Noah responds with an equal sense of romance:

That night, after he left Miriam, Noah had been filled with something of that old awe, a touch of that first-discovered beauty, and he had walked along happily--dead sure that life was a perfect thing--for several hours. . . . I'm never going to die, he thought. Dying would be stupid.<sup>14</sup>

For a time their love affair goes well. But Miriam's insecurity prompts her to a clinging dependence which ultimately strangles romance. She wants the security of Theo and the passion of Noah, and cannot really bring

herself to choose: "she wanted love, but on the terms of security."<sup>15</sup> When the affair runs into trouble, Noah confronts a familiar ambivalence. If he leaves Miriam, the Adlers' perverse bias against a Jewish-Gentile relationship would be vindicated. But then Noah can hardly marry Miriam to prove a point. Noah is obviously hesitant about hurting Miriam, yet the ruthlessness of a man trying to be honest with himself would prevent a marriage out of pity. And, of course, in his rejection of Miriam, Noah is avoiding commitment. The one alternative would transform a marriage into a cause, and the other would define him as therapist to Miriam's neuroses. For the moment then, love, at least with Miriam, is not the "something to say yes to," and Noah is delivered back into the precarious state of freedom.

Noah begins to understand the anguish of his freedom:

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.<sup>16</sup>

The chief gift of a false ethic, which is all that Noah is allowed to experience, is that it makes life so easy. One's enemies are focused, and one's needs are channelled into exclusive and unquestioned solidarity. Noah's mental toughness discerns a demeaning pattern in

such an ethic:

"There is the kind of Jew, . . . who gets the same nourishment out of a Goy as the worst type of communist gets from a lynching in the South. Take the Goy away from him and you're pulling out the thread that holds him together."<sup>17</sup>

Richler's cynical scalpel separates the dead flesh of false principle from the bare bones of power and leads the reader to the conclusion that members of a group are members because of the accident of birth and circumstance, motivated not by principle, but by self or class-interest. They inherit their enemies rather than choose them, and are really all kin in the same power struggle. As Noah explains:

The guy who wants to get into the restricted golf course or hotel and the guy who won't let him in are really brothers.<sup>18</sup>

Noah tries to interrupt the dreary repetitiveness of group monomania. He rejects his inheritance of enemies, the goys, but finds little to gain in merely turning about to embrace them. Noah comes to realize that the world of the Halls,

. . . has little veracity, if more novelty, than the one I have sprung from. Noah was exhilarated. He felt that he was no longer merely a rebel. An iconoclast.<sup>19</sup>

One must make one's own choices with a strong sense of critical independence. In opposition to the abstract and rigid scheme of friend and foe, Noah struggles to develop a personal and concrete morality of his own. It is still embryonic and full of self-doubt. Its emergent quality prohibits any programmatic articulation, and Noah prefers to suspend choice, to retain freedom at the cost of ambivalence. Panofsky asks:

"Are you a communist, Noah?"

"I don't think so."

"This is no answer."

"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. . . ."

"Still that is no answer."

"What if there are no answers? Or if the answers offered are not suitable - what then? Perhaps there are only more questions?"<sup>20</sup>

Few could accept the isolation of Noah's position.

Most men,

. . . had accepted the lies that had been offered them like the wiser natives must have accepted shiny beads and bits of broken glass from the white traders, not because they had believed, but because they had chosen not to quarrel.<sup>21</sup>

As the quarrel takes on metaphysical dimensions, the great fear becomes audible as a suspicion that perhaps on the other side of social reality lies a universal chaos, a deeper and more imminent destroyer than an already confused mortality can handle.

The universality of fear, specifically the fear of chaos, is plain enough. The Goldenbergs could not cope with the disruptive fact of Harvey's homosexuality, a fact that might undermine their pretense of respectability. More importantly, Noah comes to an understanding of the similar ability of a nation to look away in the face of its own barbarism:

At last Noah understood about the concentration camps. . . . The Germans had told the truth when they said that they hadn't known. They couldn't cope with knowing.<sup>22</sup>

But it is through the circumstances of his father's death that Noah sees the problem of dishonesty in the most complex fashion.

Shloime and the Avengers set fire to the office of Melech's scrap yard. Inside the office lies Melech's box, the contents of which serve as a central structural symbol in the novel. Wolf Adler, thinking that the box contains money, rushes into the flaming shack and is killed. When Wolf's body is dug out of the smoking debris, the box is found clutched to his chest. Noah,

the first person near the body, opens the box and finds a bundle of letters and some photographs which he pockets to examine later. He does not remove, however, the bundle of scrolls which Melech, an amateur scribe, has been working on. A morbid onlooker sees the scrolls, and starts the cry: "Wolf Adler died for the Torah." The cry is taken up by the crowd and Wolf Adler becomes a hero.

All the Adlers are unsure about the veracity of this heroic version of Wolf's death. But whatever their private doubts, publicly they assume a pride in their connection with Wolf's heroics. It is to Max's political advantage to have a hero of the people in the family. To cash in on the publicity, Max arranges for a press conference and a platitudinous sermon by Rabbi Fishman. There is a fine piece of sustained irony in the contrast between Fishman's sermon and the private struggle of all at the graveside to reconcile the Wolf they knew with the man who died for the Torah. Leah forgets the fact that she despised Wolf while married to him, and is willing to exchange the role of unhappy wife with famous widow. The rest of the Adlers can hardly believe the story, but are more than willing to give Wolf the benefit of the doubt. To believe anything else would implicate them all in the profoundest sort of chaos. As death

brings man perilously close to the edge of meaninglessness in the most natural circumstances, the Adlers' preference for illusion over the reality is at least humanly understandable.

But Max's planned exploitation of Wolf's death is a perversity and distortion that Noah cannot accept. Indeed, Noah's refusal to accept the swindled death of his father explains his differences with his family. To the others it is ammunition and inspiration for group values. Noah's loyalty lies elsewhere, to the truth of his father's life, and to the perseverance of love through that truth:

I am thankful, Daddy, that if you were here you would have had the good sense to have turned your back on it. Speeches, you would have said. Prayers. You would have walked away. But I can't. Ironic that you who suffered so much all your life for what people said should not be capable of hearing when they, the people, are at last saying fine things about you. Because you have died I will learn in time to remember you for the warming things you have said and for giving me life.<sup>23</sup>

The circumstances of his father's death teach Noah the necessity of compassion. He spares his mother from the truth, and comes to love Melech for his attempt to protect his father's name, an unexpected gift of compassion from the otherwise rigidly correct Melech.

Noah learns that no one is simply one-dimensional. When Noah learns of the contents of the box, he sees that the stern, just patriarch had once had an unfortunate love affair with the Gentile Helga. But Melech had forsaken Helga for the more comfortable environ of orthodoxy, and Noah's steadfast refusal to return to the fold calls Melech a coward. Noah learns compassion, but not at the expense of moral discrimination.

Noah assures Melech, somewhat hesitantly, that he is not the enemy he is taken for:

"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."<sup>24</sup>

In asking Melech for a hand-copied scroll, Noah asks for a favour that might, at another time, put Noah in his grandfather's debt. But Noah's moral superiority turns the request around, and Melech feels punished for his cowardice.

Noah has come to understand why he cannot "say yes" to his background, but as yet he has not found a substitute, only criteria. He leaves for Europe not to forge the uncreated conscience of his race, but modestly, "to understand things better."<sup>25</sup> Noah begins the novel battling corruption with his adolescent



honesty and brutality, and, on the way, plucks the virtue of compassion from his path of disillusion. The price of a good man's assertion is heavy, however, as his departure indirectly causes the death of his mother. If the chronology of Richler's first two novels is reversed, the struggle of André Bennett in Spain becomes a continuation of Noah's search for understanding. The reader can anticipate that the toll of guilt over his mother's death will be as crippling for Noah as the death of Ida was for André Bennett. Both novels end on an ambivalent and open note, but the reader is left wondering whether Noah's search, like André's, might destroy him.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>George Woodcock, Introduction to Son of a Smaller Hero, New Canadian Library, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), p. ix.

<sup>2</sup>Mordecai Richler, Son of a Smaller Hero, p. 184.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 73-4.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 150-1.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

CHAPTER III

A CHOICE OF ENEMIES

While the protagonists of the earlier works, André Bennett and Noah Adler, struggle towards their hesitant conclusions about what is valuable in life, the protagonist of A Choice of Enemies, Norman Price, has lived with confidence in the value of his code. Norman Price is twenty years older than André and Noah, and for that period of time he has been a Marxist. Shortly after the novel begins, however, Norman's faith falters:

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.<sup>1</sup>

The rest of the novel records the accelerating process of Norman's disillusionment with Marxism. The narrative path leads to romantic despair, a kind of pessimistic rage against the facts of experience that cruelly undermine man's ideologies, to a seedy corruption and to an ego-serving cynicism which is the last romantic consolation. Yet out of this narcissistic despair, the novel concludes with a comic movement, as Norman hesitantly moves towards some vague and personal affirmation.

Most readers would find a journal of diminishing confidence in radical politics and a corresponding hope

for personal value a contemporary theme. Yet Nathan Cohen finds Richler's pre-occupation with Marxism an issue without current validity. Arthur Koestler and George Orwell, Cohen feels, have exhausted the literary worth of the subject, and Cohen argues that any further discussion of Marxism in the novel constitutes a regressive step.<sup>2</sup> But the shape of Marxism has changed considerably since Orwell's revelations, due to the influence of contemporary thinkers such as Marcuse, Adorno, Fanon and Lukács. Not that Richler's work does not appear dated in certain details; its reliance on a historical event, the Khrushchev revelations of 1956, necessarily reflect the specific concerns of that moment. But beyond the accidental details of the plot lies a theme that is an accurate portrait of twentieth century malaise, the struggle to survive disillusion.

Nevertheless, A Choice of Enemies is not Richler at his best. It is a novel of uneven quality, with moments of pretentious writing:

As the four boys descended the musty concrete steps a thick-lipped blues, washed up with the yellow smoke and laughter, slapped against the stones.<sup>3</sup>

Such passages are reminiscent of The Acrobats' extravagant rhetoric. The plot, the struggle between Norman and

Ernst Haupt (who has murdered Norman's half-brother, Nicky) for the affection of Sally MacPherson, has a wild improbability, and forces Richler to contrive facts and situations which disturb the supposedly realistic limits of his form. The suspense sequence in which Sally dies and the mock-committee scene in which Norman is purged by his friends are too obtrusive; the former involves a precious straining for effect, the latter is too glibly achieved.

However, there is much to be admired in A Choice of Enemies. As in Son of a Smaller Hero, Richler shows his talent for capturing the essence of a small community. The community in this case is made up of exiles from Hollywood, film people who have been black-listed for leftist leanings. When they come together it is for mutual support. To maintain their sense of their own power, they help each other find work, make sometimes mock-deals for properties, and try to keep sane as well as working. They are an alien, insular and defensive group, their inherent nastiness modified only by a sense of wit and style:

Proud they were. They had come to conquer. Instead they were being picked off one by one by the cold, drink and indifference. They abjured taking part in the communal life. They mocked the local customs from the school tie to queueing, and

were for the most part free of them by dint of their square, classless accents. Unlike their forebears, they were punk imperialists. They didn't marry and settle down among the natives. They had brought their own women and electric shavers with them. They had through the years evolved from communists to fellow-travellers to tourists. Tourists. For even those who had lived in London for years only knew the true life of the city as a rumour. Around and around them the natives, it seemed, were stirred by Diana Dors, a rise in bus fares, test matches, automation, and Princess Margaret.<sup>4</sup>

Still, Norman is very proud of his community of friends. Although they were naturally in competition, they generously shared out the available work, lent each other money in times of stress, and under the direction of their patriarch, Sonny Winkleman, conducted themselves with a certain grace.

Into this circle of Norman and his friends comes Sally, a refreshingly American and simple girl, who naively complains of her father that, "Gentle men don't shake the world."<sup>5</sup> Basically indefatigable, she remains a little puzzled by the defeated, middle-aged and sane world of London. She is a product of an essentially ordered world where quarrels over who is going to do the dishes, or her mother's refusal to let her stay out late, are minor crises suddenly and inexplicably resolved. Her world has been essentially an interior one, and



attempts to connect it with larger concerns, like her father's refusal to buy South African sherry, are largely sentimental. It is her simplicity and wholesomeness that so attracts Norman, for she seems, for a time, to be an alternative to the mock-decadence of a disgraced academic.

The connection between Norman and Sally is not finally made, for news of his brother's death so disturbs Norman that he takes flight for the continent. After a brief recuperation in France and Spain, marked by the renewal of his neurotic affiliation with Spain and its cause, and by an amusing affair with a writer of pornography, Norman's despair mysteriously lifts. He must get back to Sally, he decides. Sally was the answer. Sally was his hope. With Sally he could make it. But, in an astonishing degree of improbability, Norman returns to find Sally living with, unknown to everybody, his brother's killer. Ernst, is rather flatly presented as a product of defunct and corrupt ideological dispute whose only common demoninator is violence. Ernst, a member of both the Hitler Youth and the FDJ, has gone past the point where he can see politics as a moral issue.

There is no right or wrong. There are conditions, rewards, punishments, and sides, but that's all.<sup>6</sup>

Ernst's support of the amoral vision brings him into conflict with Winkleman and his group, with their rigid adherence to a narrowly conceived morality. Norman's growing skepticism about the value of Marxism places him in the middle of the two positions, in uncomfortable ambivalence.

Winkleman, the voice of commitment, speaks to Norman, reminding him that the world is divided into friends and enemies:

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 to help the other side?<sup>7</sup>

Norman desperately needs his friends, and, in the past, has shared their exclusive views. His circle of friends helps hold him together, and Norman's need for social acceptance is made evident by his wartime crash, when he realizes that he would rather suffer impotency "than a disfigurement he couldn't conceal from society."<sup>8</sup>

Eventually, the self-regarding insularity of the groups grows tedious and Norman nostalgically reflects on their diminishing quality since Hollywood:

That was when wit and achievement had still been the criteria of acceptance

while here in London all that was asked was that you had acquitted yourself honourably before the committee.<sup>9</sup>

Norman's critical nature re-asserts itself in ways disquieting to his own spirit. His embarrassed reaction to a political play recalls Noah's similar response to the enthusiasms of a Zionist meeting:

The play, a political comedy, was spiked by puerile jokes about Eden, Rhee, Dulles, and the rest of them, but the audience responded with laughter wild and febrile. Tense, thick faces. Partisans.<sup>10</sup>

Their sad, savage laughter drives Norman away, and leads him to agree with Sally's observation that:

. . . 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 'hometown', but your contributions were 'concrete', your faith 'progressive' and your enemies 'reactionary'. Joe Hill ousted Down by the Old Mill Stream, but, though the sentiment was loftier, it was still uncritical, still stickily there.<sup>11</sup>

So Norman, who had "resolved to keep his life free of disturbances,"<sup>12</sup> and who had found in Marxism a code of singular value, feels "the sands shift under him."<sup>13</sup>

The enmity of his friends grows from suspicion and

seeks the support of rumour that Norman is actually destroying them. Their use of lies and rumour, their reliance on anonymous jealousy, their eventual black-listing of Norman, parallels the techniques of the McCarthy committee. Nowhere else is Richler so explicit in stating his suspicion that the basis of ideological dispute is not principle, but power. Perhaps it is too explicit, for the sentiment is better handled elsewhere, notably in Cocksure. But this Richler suspicion, which is so closely connected with his general skepticism, begins in Norman's response to being told that he is, in effect, blacklisted:

From where I stand it looks like his principle is the same as theirs. Freedom for Winkleman to speak. Freedom for Winkleman to believe what he likes.<sup>14</sup>

But behind the political framework of the novel lies the awareness of ordinary life, distinct from politics, desperate in its isolation. While expatriate movie-makers argue ideology, all around them flesh and blood moves painfully from day-to-day:

Think of all the shifting, homeless people of London, scrabbling over each other's backs and just about making-do. All those tweedy, slap-footed girls reqd. at a starting sal. of 10 wk., long hopeful ladies with commercial knowl. & exp. and a shorthand and typing speed of

100/50 w.p.m. being offered canteen facilities, a pension scheme, chilblains, a divan-sit. with a gas ckr. of their very own - Comf. musical/lit interests - and, once yearly, a chance to chase the sun to Sorrento or Southend for two more weeks of chastity. Norman bent into the rain, his back hunched as though from every window those girls were peering down at him accusingly. Oh, give a moment's thought please to the librarian, Grade IV, with some practical exp. of classifying, cataloguing, and rolling his own cigarettes, off tonight to hear Donald Soper and other prominent speakers protest at Caxton Hall, and to look left, right, and centre, only to come home alone again to an X cert. dream. A thought, too, if you don't mind, for Mayfair Social Appointments, who will find you the Right Partner for all occasions. A second's silence, please, for the elderly lady who hawks Peace News in the wind and the rain of Edgeware Road.

Think of the pain, Norman thought, the pain of all these people in their damp, ill-lit individual cells. Add it up.<sup>15</sup>

Here, with rhythmic insistency, Richler stresses the greater integrity of individual pain over the deprivations of the left. Richler remembers that ideological structures rest on a legacy of flesh that is weak and in need of support. Ever critical of ideological excess, Richler offers sympathy to those who share the vulnerability of individual life.

At any rate, with the Kruschov revelations, the political faction loses what little integrity it has managed to maintain. Various members of the group wonder

what it is that they can say to their children, how can they explain years of support for a barbaric regime. Some lie to themselves, shielding themselves from the impact of disillusion with the consolation that, even if a generation was sacrificed, perhaps it was a necessary stage. Most, however, realize the grim absurdity of their lives. Having valued political virtue above all else, they look back on lives in the service of institutional terror. The irony of Charlie Lawson's life, a peripheral member of the group, serves as a paradigm for the failed vision of the group:

Charlie, he felt, had been waiting for Lefty all these years. He was forty. Godot had come instead.<sup>16</sup>

At this point in the novel, Norman turns cynically from his friends. If their hypocrisy was once outrageous, now their sense of apology and sense of guilt become tedious. Norman allows himself to drift in a kind of listless half-life. The drift brings him to an accidental attachment with a young, not terribly attractive English girl, Vivian. Norman slowly realizes that if he is to fashion a new life for himself, his old life with Winkleman and company being irretrievably lost, he must fashion it out of his present modest circumstances.

As the novel draws to a close, there is faltering

movement away from cynicism and disillusion, and a correspondingly weak movement towards achievement. Peter Dale Scott draws the reader's attention towards a pattern of restricted comic movement.<sup>17</sup> The Acrobats ends with a symbolic birth at the expense of André's death. In Son of a Smaller Hero, Noah's escape from the ghetto is cruelly won with his mother's death. Duddy, at terrible cost, achieves his dream. In the same way, A Choice of Enemies closes with a usually comic celebration, this time of marriage. But the celebration is undermined by its accidental quality. When Norman decides to tell Vivian that he is leaving the country, Vivian interrupts him with an initiative to break their relationship. Norman, in a moment of anxious befuddled response, blurts out a proposal of marriage. And so, quite quickly, without reflection, they are married in the Chelsea Registry Office on a rainy Saturday afternoon. The point is that in the struggle to secure something of value Richler does allow his protagonists a partial victory. But it is only partial. There is no final resolution, no truly secure resting place for the Richler hero. There always remains what was before, the commonplace day-to-day rhythm of fluctuating hope and despair.

Sally, earlier in the novel, sees the casual nature of the working out of hope:

You thought you'd never learn to do long division or ride a bicycle, you never really believed you'd get to Europe, but you did, you thought you were surely pregnant this time, but you were late, that's all. In the end everything worked out.<sup>18</sup>

The plot, however, insists that not everything works out. Norman's brother, Nicky, and Sally herself, die stupidly as mere casualties in the novel's progress. But the plot does suggest that some things do work out. In the same accidental way one learns to ride a bicycle, Norman falters towards his modest achievement.

He must cope with several ironies first. He is taunted at his own wedding reception by the silly and cynical Haig. At the party:

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.<sup>19</sup>

Norman realizes with dismay that Vivian sees in their marriage her long-awaited, well-deserved chance for glamour, her entrance into the world of films, important people, and impressive novels. She does not realize how thoroughly Norman has repudiated that world with their marriage, or that the limits of his ambition go no further than the desire to retreat, to settle down, and to return to teaching.



At the party Norman evaluates his time and place in metaphor:

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, he thought, was surely an age of silence. A time of collisions. A place 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.<sup>20</sup>

Overcoming one's own circumstances, Richler seems to be saying, is no longer possible, since the circumstances themselves are so frequently the product of the capricious forces of history. If the act of transcending one's situation belongs more properly to a heroic age, then, in this time of less spectacular answers, survival of disillusion and perseverance through limitation take on a kind of heroic worth.

The book closes with an incredible power. The reader leaves Norman and Vivian, each a precarious value to the other, balanced on an ambiguity of intention, emotion and situation. Modestly, Norman and Vivian will try to persevere through the fluctuating rhythms of day-

to-day consciousness, together with the quiet pain and  
the smile well-intended, where there is no center,  
where tomorrow is beyond one's shaping.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Mordecai Richler, A Choice of Enemies, (London: André Deutsch, 1957), p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>Nathan Cohen, "Heroes of the Richler View," Tamarack Review, No. 6 (1957), p. 53.

<sup>3</sup>Mordecai Richler, A Choice of Enemies, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-8.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 126-7.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 170-1.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>17</sup>Peter Dale Scott, "A Choice of Certainties," Tamarack Review, No. 8 (1958), p. 78.

<sup>18</sup>A Choice of Enemies, p. 208.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

CHAPTER IV

THE APPRENTICESHIP OF DUDDY KRAVITZ

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz is a pivotal novel in Richler's development. A departure from the realism of the earlier works, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz marks Richler's venture into ironic fantasy. Not that the early novels are without wit or ironic comment, but the main narrative style remains within the context or bounds of realistic fiction. The adventuresome quality of The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz suggests that Richler has grown tired of the limits of realism. Beyond The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, of course, lie more extreme departures from realism, culminating in the madcap fantasy and militant satire of Cocksure. But with The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz Richler is content to divest himself of some of the romantic seriousness of the earlier works. It is his first novel with a clear separation of identity between the writer and the protagonist, which quite naturally sets up an ironic perspective. This ironic perspective replaces the self-regarding quality of the earlier works, with their record of the struggles of angst-ridden artists coping with their existential dilemmas. Less tendentious than The Acrobats, Son of a Smaller Hero, or A Choice of Enemies, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz moves towards a more

ambiguous and poetic kind of truth.

Critical attention has been heavily focused on The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. William New writes:

Duddy moves through a complicated but essentially extra-human sequence of events which, because incongruous, excites laughter. The laughter is directed at an outsider to the ordinary human predicament whose conflict is yet typical of it, and because he can surmount his difficulties in unorthodox and cumulatively extravagant ways, he wins, like Donleavy's Ginger Man, a sort of admiration without respect, a sufferance without approval, an attraction without sympathy, and an attachment without involved concern.<sup>1</sup>

Duddy is well linked to Sebastian Dangerfield, but more importantly Mr. New points to the "essentially extra-human" quality which constitutes the mode of comedy. And it is a comic, or more properly, ironic mode that determines our attitude to character. This ironic spirit undermines the eloquent attempts of Warren Tallman to make Duddy something of a Nietzschean super-hero. Tallman begins with a very personal and theoretical preamble:

In significant fiction the protagonists are likely to wander beyond established social forms to new areas of the imagination from which better forms of truth can be glimpsed. Such wanderings are necessary because there is so little truth in the established forms, so little regard for human need and human desire.<sup>2</sup>

Tallman then proceeds to undercut the other inhabitants of

Duddy's world as sentimental clingers to the defensive posture of clichéd and therefore empty established forms:

All of the other people in the novel cannot possess themselves because their vital energies are devoted full-time to maintaining the false appearances in terms of which they identify themselves.<sup>3</sup>

None of these best people in Duddy's life have anything to save themselves except those conventions which they put on to hide from shame whenever cold winds blow their human nakedness home.<sup>4</sup>

Duddy is correspondingly painted as the self-possessed man, the ruthless truth-seeker who lives as other, lesser men are frightened to do.

Duddy is never ashamed of his own humanity - even when it is threadbare - and that makes all the difference. His seeming wrong-doings trace to an inability amounting to an unwillingness to realize or recognize the crippled condition in which he and all of the others live. At the last, when he orders Dingleman off his land ("Faster you bastard. Run Dingleman. Lets see you run on those sticks.") he is ostensibly shooing away his most dangerous rival for ownership of the land. Actually he is possessing his dream. He has done with cripples.<sup>5</sup>

But the novel is much more ambiguous than this pattern of ultimately successful rebellion aiming for a New Paradise. To begin with, even Dingleman is not simply "thoroughly vicious". He is a wiser man than Duddy. The source of dreams for Max, Dingleman, after



his "personal troubles" does not make the mistake of believing his publicity. After accidentally meeting his former girl-friend Olive at the party in New York, Dingleman becomes philosophic. It is as if Dingleman sees in Duddy his own younger, undefeated self, brash, vulgar and ruthless, and he attempts to warn Duddy:

'There's something wrong. A mistake somewhere when a boy your age is already pursuing money like he had a hot poker up his ass.'<sup>6</sup>

It would be wrong to whitewash Dingleman. He exploits Duddy to transport heroin across the border and is a ruthless competitor for Duddy's land. But there is something that reserves Dingleman from the stereotype gangster figure. He has learned the fact of limitation on his dreams, he has known the pain of "personal troubles" and this serves to make him more human. It also gives him insight. It is he who correctly interprets Simcha Kravitz's disillusion with Duddy's triumph. As Duddy stares incredulously at the retreating figure of his grandfather, the man who told him over and over again that a "man without land is nobody",<sup>7</sup> Dingleman asks Duddy if he has ever read any Yiddish poetry:

'Zeyda, come back, ZEYDA!'

But the old man continued towards the car.

'Certainly not,' Dingleman continued. 'But if you had you'd know about those old men. Sitting in their dark cramped ghetto corners they wrote the most mawkish, school-girlish stuff about green fields and sky. Terrible poetry but touching when you consider the circumstances under which it was written. Your grandfather doesn't want any land. He wouldn't know what to do with it.'

'Will you shettup, please?'

'Duddy, don't talk like that. He's excited, Jerry. He - '

'He said a man without land was nobody.'

'He never thought you'd make it,' Dingleman said. 'Now you've frightened him. They want to die in the same suffocating way they lived, bent over a last or a cutting table or a freezing junk yard shack.'<sup>18</sup>

Dingleman and Duddy are enemies; they are also very similar. But Dingleman lacks Duddy's innocence, and that not only serves to make him more culpable but also more perceptive.

The one man who does have a romantic Nietzschean image of himself is Mr. Cohen, whose rationale is precariously balanced on natural selection and which pretends to see life honestly.

It's a battlefield, he thought, it sure is. But you and I, Duddy, we're officers and that makes it even harder. (Remember how Gregory Peck had to send his fliers out to die in Twelve O'Clock High?).

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, just like in that poem Bernie  
read me. It's a battlefield. I didn't  
make it (I wasn't asked). I've got to live,  
that's all.<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere Mr. Cohen admits to a kinship with Duddy,  
suggesting that, "We're two of a kind, you know."<sup>10</sup> But  
even this epitome of North American acquisitiveness has  
to face his own mortality. The discrepancy between his  
achievement and his satisfaction still looms large. His  
fifty thousand dollar home, his wife's dream, is no  
resting place for Cohen's gods, indeed the only room he  
could tolerate was the kitchen. With his wife up north  
for the summer, Cohen is able to keep a smoked meat in  
the fridge in defiance of fashionable, youth-prolonging  
food trends. His solace is to indulge and expend himself  
in a defensive and somewhat pathetic contradiction of his  
own ideology.

There was nobody to lecture him about  
calories and stomach linings and fatty  
tissue around the heart. He made himself  
an enormous sandwich, leaned back, and  
let out a resounding burp.

It's my house, he thought, and I can  
do what I want here.<sup>11</sup>

Uncle Benjy, the cynic with a drinking problem, who  
likes to kid his fellow manufacturers about nationalization,

is the antithesis of Mr. Cohen. Uncle Benjy is a misfit:

Uncle Benjy got along no better with the communists who came to him for money. He couldn't forgive them their abuse of Trotsky and they were unhappy about his little irreverences, like making an ostentatious sign of the cross when Peltier mentioned Stalin. Books probably gave him the most enjoyment, and Benjy was a prodigious reader. But here too there was more disappointment than pleasure. Tolstoi, yes, and Balzac. Gorki, too. But where among the modern belly-achers was there a writer to teach him about a fat factory owner, hopelessly in love with a woman who dyed her hair, wore too much rouge, and preferred contract bridge to Bach. A foolish woman. Ida. 'Even if we could have a son,' he often thought, 'Ida would be no fit companion for my old age, so, why . . . ' He didn't understand why and nobody could tell him.<sup>12</sup>

Uncle Benjy is a cynic, an attitude that is enforced on him by the mean reality on which his former hopes were based. That the cynic may be right is perhaps Richler's final fear, but one which he represses, with effort, right from the start of his career with Chaim's reply to Toni that there is always hope. But Uncle Benjy's sense of limitation has no chance to humanize Duddy's cocksure self-expression. He humiliated Duddy when Duddy worked for him, and Duddy does not forget. Uncle Benjy undervalues Duddy until it is too late. In direct opposition to Mr. Cohen's extravagant metaphor, Duddy's uncle advises:

There's more to you than a 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.<sup>13</sup>

And he is so right. The "scheming little bastard" 'broke' Mr. MacPherson, lied his way into business, cheated his friend Virgil, and treated his shiksa Girl Friday as ultimately expendable. The "fine, intelligent boy" saved Lennie from career disaster, shrewdly manipulated Aunt Ida back to her dying husband, and laboured to make his grandfather's dream an actuality with an incredible family devotion. The human Duddy desperately wants to know if his Mother loved him, but cannot risk asking to find out. This Duddy is warmly affectionate to Friar and Hersh, generous with his brother, and occasionally tender to Yvette. It is the Duddy who in the midst of his frantic pace, pauses to listen to the still, sad music of his own mortality:

'He's going to die, Yvette. Isn't that terrible?'<sup>14</sup>

But Uncle Benjy's fear is well-founded and when it comes

time to choose, Duddy murders the "fine intelligent boy" and becomes the "scheming little bastard".

Remembering that Mr. Cohen has expressed a feeling of kinship with Duddy, it is significant that Richler makes some attempt at connecting Duddy and Dingleman. Duddy's father, Max the Hack, is a true believer and chief perpetrator of the Boy Wonder legend. Frequently given to a ritual elaboration of the Boy Wonder's exploits, Max's face was always, "suffused with such enthusiasm that the men, though they had heard it time and again, sure as they were that it would come out right in the end, unflinchingly moved in closer, their fears and hopes riding with the Boy Wonder in Baltimore, who, as Max said, was only a St. Urbain Street boy."<sup>15</sup>

Such was the atmosphere of Duddy's growing up, with the Boy Wonder constantly being held up as an ideal worthy of emulation. Duddy explicitly announces that he is going to be a somebody, another Boy Wonder maybe. His trip to New Yorks seems almost an apprenticeship to Dingleman. Duddy, perhaps in an even conscious attempt to imitate Dingleman, plays up to and surrounds himself with Hersh's artistic friends. After being humiliated at Dingleman's party for his lack of sophistication Duddy pretends to a veneer of cultivation. "Man does not live by bread alone," Duddy reminds Yvette and goes on to remark that some very

successful businessmen study "philosophy and shit like that."<sup>16</sup> Duddy wants to get his land by any back-alley route, but he also wants to be esteemed, to be thought "high class", like Dingleman. Finally, to ensure that the connection between the two is made, Richler has Max celebrate Duddy's triumph in tones reminiscent of his former service to Dingleman:

'Even as a kid,' he said, sucking a sugar cube, 'way back there before he had begun to make his mark, my boy was a troublemaker. He was born on the wrong side of the tracks with a rusty spoon in his mouth, so to speak, and the spark of rebellion in him. A motherless boy,' he said, pounding the table, 'but one who thrived on adversity, like Maxim Gorki or Eddy Cantor, if you're familiar with their histories. You could see from the day of his birth that he was slated for fame and fortune. A comer. Why I remember when he was still at FFHS they had a teacher there, an anti-semite of the anti-semites, a lush-head, and my boy was the one who led the fight against him and drove him out of the school. Just a skinny little fart he was at the time, a St. Urbain Street boy, and he led a fearless campaign against this bastard MacPherson ...'<sup>17</sup>

Richler wants the reader to be sure of what Duddy's choice involves. When he rejects his Uncle Benjy's advice and instead murders his good side, there is little more to Duddy than a pint-size Dingleman.

Yet Warren Tallman finds Duddy's response to Simcha Kravitz's dream of land heroic:

. . . the difference between Duddy and everyone else in the novel is that he awakens to this vision. What is more, he believes. What is most important of all, he has faith. Like the fool who eventually turns up as the type of wisdom, or the outcast who practices those virtues in whose name he has been banished, Duddy emerges as the secret hero of the world he has played at with seeming fast and loose.<sup>18</sup>

But Duddy's belief is based on a gross misconception which can hardly be construed as a type of wisdom - "A man without land is nobody. Remember that, Duddel."<sup>20</sup> This is the stuff of dreams, the pleasant reverie amid an otherwise sordid condition (the hoped for place of peace, the cessation of struggle, when struggle is so instinctive and habitual a part of the pattern of daily life, that peace in actuality is alien). The dream serves to justify the struggle, but the struggle knows no resolution this side of death. This is what Duddy does not understand. He believes in ultimate self-assertion, culminating in the dissolution of conflict. Simcha believes in the dream, but not the dream of flesh. When Duddy tells him of his discovery:

Simcha smiled, he made a deprecating gesture with his hand. 'Lie to an old man,' he said.<sup>20</sup>

He is ready for dreaming, but not for possession. Simcha is a European, conditioned to irony and yet



withholding romance from cynicism. He is not ready for North American self-assertion, for that confidence that the dream can be carved out of this continent. If anyone doubts this emphasis on the peculiarly American cast of Duddy's struggle, one need not look only at his ruthless business practice. Consider his vision:

I was right he thought. I knew what I was doing. Five years from now this land will be worth a fortune.

There could have been a real snazzy hotel and a camp, the finest ski-tow money could buy, canoes, cottages, dancing on the lake, bonfires, a movie, a skating rink, fireworks on Israeli Independence Day, a synagogue, a Western-style saloon, and people saying, 'Good morning, sir,' adding in a whisper after he'd passed, 'That was Kravitz. He built the whole shebang. They used to say he was a dreamer and he'd never make it.'<sup>21</sup>

Duddy cannot understand the European dream. He limits it by putting it into practice, by taking it literally. MacPherson's curse, "You'll go far, Kravitz. You're going to go very far,"<sup>22</sup> haunts the novel and hints to the truth that Duddy will always go too far.

Tallman accuses Simcha of sending Duddy on a journey he would not take himself.<sup>23</sup> But Duddy was not sent, he took off on his own obsession, riding bareback and hard over the gently shaped shadow of hope in his Zeyda. Nature is a symbol for Simcha, a symbol of a better world, of a

quieter resting place than his life has yet shown him. Simcha does not confuse the entirely different states of actuality and dream; he is content to have Nature as a symbol. If too fearful to leave his last, he is wise enough not to chase after disillusion.

Duddy, of course, is all confidence with too little wisdom. He feels that he can chase the dream, confident that if he can only run fast enough he can overtake the dream and possess it. In the possession Duddy perverts the dream. Forcing the dream to yield to the dimensions of actuality becomes Duddy's obsession, an obsession that overrides merely human concerns, thereby destroying the dream's original worth. As Simcha explains to Duddy:

'I can see what you 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.'<sup>24</sup>

Duddy at the last accuses Yvette of betraying his dream, and in a sense she does. Duddy felt that one day resolution would actually be his, and that that glorious moment was worth any means, any sacrifices, any doublecross to attain. More than anything else he wanted, he was sure, that possession of his dream would come. Given that assumption, his means have some logical justification. Duddy ultimately saw himself as public benefactor,

protector of the down-trodden, patron of the arts and loyal friend. But Duddy's vision never saw resolution. All through the novel Yvette has feared the moment when Duddy would possess the land, only to find the struggle to develop it even more momentous. She feared for his sanity. For she saw the world with a clear vision of human limitation, and in part, at least, this is fundamental to Richler's ironic view.

Because one is never the saint or irresistible lover one longs to be, because the world resists attempts to cast it back to Eden, Richler insists on the ironic fact of limitation. Within this context Richler strives to be fair to Duddy's embodiment of North American myth. Duddy ends in comic triumph. Ironically robbed of his Zeyda's approval, Duddy still has consolation in possession. For moral condemnation means less to Duddy than the wonder of his possession. "You see, You see,"<sup>25</sup> exclaims Duddy, his voice filled with marvel. But his shout comes after the grimer, more defensive, and truer statement:

The land is yours, he thought, and nothing they do or say or feel can take it away from you. You pay a price.<sup>26</sup>

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>William H. New, "The Apprenticeship of Discovery," Canadian Literature, No. 29 (Summer 1966), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Warren Tallman, "Richler and the Faithless City," Canadian Literature, No. 3 (1960), p. 62.

<sup>3</sup>Mordecai Richler, "Wolf in the Snow," (Part II), Canadian Literature, No. 6 (1960), p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>Warren Tallman, "Richler and the Faithless City," p. 63.

<sup>5</sup>"Richler and the Faithless City," p. 64.

<sup>6</sup>Mordecai Richler, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, (Warmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 141.

<sup>7</sup>Duddy Kravitz, p. 48.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 266-7.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 267

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 60

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-6.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 224-5.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 315

<sup>18</sup>Warren Tallman, "Richler and the Faithless City," p. 63.

<sup>19</sup>Duddy Kravitz, p. 48.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 106

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 280

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>23</sup>Warren Tallman, "Richler and the Faithless City," p. 63.

<sup>24</sup>Duddy Kravitz, p. 312

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 316

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 313

CHAPTER V

COCKSURE

Mordecai Richler judges Cocksure a success. The critics, however, seem to make considerably less of his blackest satire. Perhaps the fact that Cocksure, by its very militancy, represents a departure from his more ironic works has undeservedly produced a chill in the critical reception afforded it.

While Cocksure has often been labelled a confusing book, the critical response has been generally unhelpful in clearing up any confusion that does exist. William New, in his review of Cocksure in Canadian Literature<sup>1</sup> has voiced a generalized discontent which does not serve to illuminate anything, as the critic never quite informs the reader of the specific causes for unhappiness. Mr. New complains that Richler lacks the weight of internationally acclaimed novelists such as Grass, Bellow or Barth. In the same review, he reviews Jack Ludwig quite enthusiastically, a judgement obviously made without benefit of comparison to Grass and company. Critical double standards have never aided the development of critical understanding, particularly when, if one is to judge Cocksure properly, one must see clearly and firmly the individuality of that novel.

In addition to showing methodological obfuscation, some critics seem a little unsure about the point of view.

The Times Literary Supplement headlines its review, "Wasp, Where is Thy Sting?" and proceeds to explain that,

Where the book begins to hurt, though, is in its assault on the values of the liberal imagination.

and

Certainly white liberalism gets badly knocked about.<sup>2</sup>

Yet "new left" journals such as Our Generation,<sup>3</sup> do not welcome this attack on their favourite target. Indeed, they feel that the main brunt of Richler's attack falls not on white liberalism but on their own more radical, purer selves. Amidst this confusion of just who is under attack, some critics find an absence of any clear-cut moral standard or criteria. After all, the argument goes, if the novel is satire, one must be given a model of moral health and balance with which to measure the aberrations. Others find the characterization stereo-typed, the plot loose-jointed and not following from any psychologically convincing motivation.

Now all this criticism, while it does have some empirical basis, fails for the lack of theoretical understanding, specifically understanding of form. It is scarcely valid criticism to undervalue pastoral poetry



for its lack of "realism", when by its very nature it transcends realistic concerns, and defines itself as stylized, and traditionally and specifically literary. So too, for Cocksure. Few of Cocksure's critics would be able to define it adequately as to genre although some conception of what the work is is surely an essential for serious criticism.

Richler himself points to the first and somewhat obvious observation:

. . . you have to sacrifice a lot when you write satire. Cocksure is the furthest I can go in that direction. I'm more interested in novels of character.<sup>4</sup>

Cocksure, then, is satire in an extreme form. Northrop Frye is only stating the obvious in his Anatomy of Criticism when he writes:

Two things then, are essential to satire; one is wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack.<sup>5</sup>

The element to be isolated for emphasis is "fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd". There is rarely anything in human experience which can be exclusively categorized as evil, offensive or deserving of attack. The satirist then has to abstract the "evil" aspect out of its more complex context, so that the target can be

more easily discerned. He has to simplify, and dehumanize before attacking, for he must guarantee himself at least a token assent from his readership as to the undesirability of the object of attack. But in simplifying and abstracting, the author is removing his work from the bounds of realistic fiction and placing it firmly in the area of fantasy.

The realization of these basics of satire should force the reader to be suspicious of objections to Cocksure which are based on criteria that has been acquired to deal with realistic novels - for example, logical plot and character development.

Many readers have assumed that Cocksure is a novel, and, applying the standards of the novel, have judged Cocksure as a badly botched job. Of course, Cocksure shares many characteristics of form with the novel. The clue to its true form, however, is the common realization that, if it is a novel, it is a hybrid form, a satiric novel.

As a satiric novel, Cocksure deals with an incredible number of targets. In the breadth of its attack it resembles the form of anatomy, an anatomy of the modern world. George Woodcock writes:

. . . one would not consider Richler an intuitive novelist; he is essentially intellectual, concerned with manners and

ideas, and obviously much nearer in his final achievement to, say, Huxley or Orwell or even Thomas Love Peacock than to Lawrence or Melville.<sup>6</sup>

Since Richler is an intellectual novelist one would expect his anatomy to be a catalogue of contemporary moods and philosophies, which begins to place Cocksure in the Menippean tradition:

The Menippean satire deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes. Pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds, are handled in terms of their occupational approach to life as distinct from their social behaviour. The Menippean satire thus resembles the confession in its ability to handle abstract ideas and theories, and differs from the novel in its characterization, which is stylized rather than naturalistic, and presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent.<sup>7</sup>

Many of the other characteristics of Menippean satire indicated by Frye can be found in Cocksure: the free play of intellectual fancy; the loose-jointed digressing narrative; the ridicule of the philosophus gloriosus; and the use of dramatic sequences for the interplay of ideas or attitudes.<sup>8</sup> And, as W. E. Yeomans points out, "when tight laws of character and story plausibility are lifted, the author of a Menippean satire can more effectively carry out his main purpose - the expression of intellectual concepts."<sup>9</sup>

Cocksure displays a dazzling "free play of intellectual fancy". It pivots basically around a favourite technique of Richler, that of inversion. The swinging "with-it" generation with all its peculiar idiosyncrasies has become the social norm, while the traditional figures of the past, from the Toryism of Agnes Ryerson to the respectable Fabian radicalism of Lord Woodcock have become less than fashionable. This kind of inversion is familiar to readers of A Choice of Enemies. Richler is fascinated by the problems of power. Beneath the fascination lies the suspicion that the argument between the left and right is not one of principles but of power, and arguments of power have suspiciously similar patterns. The victims of tyranny in A Choice of Enemies fight for the capability of becoming tyrants, not for the end of tyranny itself.

In Cocksure, the liberated behave in similar patterns to the generations whose values they have replaced. Joyce, in her eagerness to be progressive, produces the same stuttering anxiety in her son through her aggressively Freudian child-rearing as her own middle-class background did to her. Doug pleads with her to tell him the lie about Christmas with all the details. Instead, he gets the truth of history, Hiroshima and The Destruction of the European Jews.

The Parent-Teacher meeting at Beatrice Webb is both a parody of traditional P.T.A. meetings and a satire on progressive rhetoric:

Francis Wharton, the enlightened TV producer, began by saying he had always voted socialist; he deplored censorship in any shape or form, on either side of the so-called Iron Curtain; Victorian double standards were anathema to him; but all the same he thought it a bit much that just because his thirteen year-old daughter was the only girl in the fifth form to stop at petting -

"Shame" somebody called out.

- heavy petting -

The objector shrugged, unimpressed.

- was no reason for her to come home with a scarlet 'T' for "tease" painted on her bosom.<sup>10</sup>

The language is changed from the conventional P.T.A. meeting, but the parental concerns (defensive postures on the welfare of the child and the family budget) remain essentially the same. One parent expresses concern over the small number of parts in the school play, The Bedroom Philosophy, obviously worried lest his child should be left out. Another parent complains about the cost of supplying a new diaphragm every term, for after all, theirs is a growing girl. A large part of the humour depends on the obvious and the scatological,

but a good deal of subtlety is missed if one does not see the satire at work; on the one hand attacking progressive pretension and on the other undermining the function of P.T.A. meetings.

When the life-style of the "kinky" becomes socially desirable, our predominant clichés are merely turned upside down. Doug is unhappy, he feels outside the normal experience because his parents are not divorced:

Doug was being misled, Mortimer knew, he was clearly better off in a happy - well, reasonably happy - home, but all the same Doug and two or three other Beatrice Webb boys felt deprived because they only had two parents each.<sup>11</sup>

Mortimer, conventionally handsome in a smooth and clean-cut Anglo-Saxon way, is doomed to live in a world which values swarthy, degenerate, interesting faces, the lived-in, scarred, full of character look. Even Ziggy Spicehandler has had a conventional enough background. Born as Gerald Spencer, he went to the right schools, Rugby, Oxford and RADA. But he soon found that his respectable background and elegant education had ill prepared him for life in modern England. He started in on his second education, a tour of "with-it" spots, to undo the effects of his first education. On his return to London he had transformed himself into,

a hipster, knowledgeable about jazz talk, Yiddish slang and drugs. He was reborn Ziggy Spicehandler, a self-confessed Renaissance Man, poet, film maker, actor and painter.<sup>12</sup>

Against this grotesque and fantastic background where the boor in power on the right has been replaced by the boor in power on the left, we are introduced to several relics of an age gone-by, displaced order-figures.

The first is Miss Ryerson whose conception of the mother country is

constructed almost entirely on literary foundations, Shakespeare, naturally, Jane Austen, The Illustrated London News, Kipling, Dickens, Beverly Baxters London Letters in MacLeans.<sup>13</sup>

Armed with these myths, Miss Ryerson is confronted with a West-End theatre season in which the Royal Shakespeare Company ventures into the theatre of cruelty, and other offerings include a "domestic comedy about a homosexual couple."<sup>14</sup> Then, in an evening before the television, her nostalgic view of England is forced to face what, in her opinion, is obviously a perversion and corruption of English tradition:

Paul McCartney joked about his M.B.E. Peter Cook recited a Betjeman-like poem celebrating the public conveniences of yesteryear. Mortimer hastily switched to the commercial channel, catching a Jesuit who was debating

with a psychiatrist whether or not Jesus Christ had had carnal knowledge of Mary, and, come to think of it, Martha as well. Switching back to the BBC, Mortimer was relieved to find Kenneth Tynan's face filling the screen. Then, just as Mortimer was explaining to Miss Ryerson that not since G.B.S. had served as a critic had London known such a dazzling reviewer, such a master of language, Tynan said it. The word.<sup>15</sup>

Confronted with this sort of degeneracy, the plucky Miss Ryerson can only roll up her sleeves and get down to the job of saving England, or at the very least Beatrice Webb school. But it must be admitted at this point that Richler fails with Miss Ryerson. There is a good deal of sympathy and admiration for her spirit, and even her emphasis on decorum seems preferable to the crude ill-manners in vogue. But Miss Ryerson's ideology cannot finally be taken seriously, and Richler cannot leave the readers' sympathy with a relic, even a well-meaning one, whose cultural habits include a dependence on Kipling, The Illustrated London News, and Beverly Baxter's London Letters. After some initial comic successes, Richler burlesques Miss Ryerson right out of the novel in the "blowing" sequence.

Lord Woodcock would certainly object to being classed as a traditional figure. But his kind of respectable Fabian dissent belongs to a more rational, less neurotic



past. His pious eccentricity, his catalogue of small kindnesses performed by Germans to Jews during the Nazi regime resembles the passionless saintliness of the more Methodist breed of Marxist. His advice to Miss Fishman to forget the past, is both clichéd and shockingly not to the point.

" . . . so it is not for the Jewish people, beloved as they are to me, to cast the first stone or to judge. Is it, my child?"

. . . . .

"Remember this too, child. Like you, Fraulein Ringler was born to die alone."<sup>16</sup>

Woodcock is the identifiable philosophus gloriosus, the charlatan wise man, and Richler's treatment of him underlines his absurdist sentimentality. This is at the tail-end of a radical career of dissent that once produced revolutionary pamphlets during the Spanish Civil War, and is now reduced to scribbling anti-establishment graffiti in the peers toilets. While the main drift of ridicule in Cocksure is directed towards more contemporary standards, it is through Lord Woodcock that Richler cancels out hope in past ideals. As old left humanism is shown to possess a shrivelling purpose, suspicion grows that perhaps the explanations of uncritical Marxists have outlived their usefulness.

In any event, all explanations fail in the bizarre world of the Star-Maker. And, as Mortimer Griffin discovers, it is impossible to escape the all-embracing influence of Star-Maker. As a conventional magnate, the Star-Maker's interests are hugely impressive, including film and TV production companies, airlines, newspapers, diamond mines, oil refineries and gambling casinos. But the secret behind his position as chieftain in the global village lies in his ability to marshal technological triumphs to his own ends. The Star-Maker's longevity, if not immortality, is assured by a travelling retinue of "spare parts" men ready at a moment's notice to sacrifice an arm, a leg, or various organs to replace their master's defective parts. Control over mass fantasies is assured Star-Maker as his marketing team accurately defines the sexual ideal. This information is later translated into robot movie stars by the "lab boys". The final scientific miracle is, of course, the Star-Maker's transformation into a self-contained creator, with male and female parts, capable of regeneration.

The Star-Maker is an extravagant symbol, and like the central structural symbols of the earlier novels, Melech's box and Duddy's lake, Star-Maker is the moving force behind much of the action. It must be admitted, however, that the occasional silliness of the Star-Maker's

portrait undermines its aim for a serious symbolic weight. But even where it misses its target the portrayal comes so close, that perhaps it is close enough, and, as Leslie Fiedler remarks of the book as a whole, "leaves permanent damage behind."<sup>17</sup> As a symbol of the profanity towards life of the new technology and the power of men who can exploit that technology, the Star-Maker burlesque bears an amazing resemblance to reality. While Masters and Johnson preach the superiority both in terms of convenience and intensity of the masturbatory orgasm to the coital orgasm, Dr. Christian Barnard seeks to push back mortal constraints with a new definition of death and a quick fingered surgical team. The extent of Star-Maker's insinuating power draws close to the paranoia-become-reality of the C.I.A. As some Women's Liberation spokesmen talk seriously of a preference for extra-uterine gestation, the Star-Maker's self-generation is but one step removed.

The interweaving of two currents of action, the Macciavelian manipulations of the Star-Maker and Mortimer Griffin's more personal course, typifies the loose-jointed nature of plot in Menippean satire. It must be granted that George Woodcock's objection,

that there is no real fusion of tone between the stick confusion of Mortimer's private life and the sinister silliness he encounters in

the company of the Star-Maker,<sup>18</sup>

is the most telling criticism of Cocksure. And yet the form itself has an inherent disparate quality, somewhat like the picaresque, in which the main burden of unity and fusion falls to the continuing presence of central characters. The world of Cocksure is a mad-house, full of paranoia and every conceivable kind of sexual neurosis. The subsequent chaos, while perhaps not the most agreeable aesthetic result, conspires to form the disquieting presence of the work.

Through the Pop underground steps the inhibited, hesitant protagonist, middle class Mortimer. Mortimer, the archetypal WASP finds himself persecuted in his turn by the professionally Jewish Shalinsky. In rejecting claims that in fact he is Jewish, Mortimer makes the mistake of over-compensating, and, in the process convincing his post-Freudian friends of the truth of Shalinsky's assertion. And, of course, in one sense Shalinsky is right. In a comic turn-about, Richler has Shalinsky pick up a theme from earlier works, that the essence of Jewishness lies in being outside the central cultural drift:

"I am not," Mortimer said, seizing Shalinsky by the shoulders and shaking him, "a Jew."

"But Griffin, Griffin, don't you see? A Jew is an idea. Today you're my idea of

a Jew."<sup>19</sup>

Always one step, if not two, behind his friends, Mortimer becomes the scapegoat of his permissive and progressive society. His war record becomes the target for Digby Jones, who, on his Insult show successfully caters to the ungenerous mood of an audience conditioned to sympathize only with anti-heroes. Abused and mocked by his friends, Mortimer is duped into posing as the enemy, the suburban middle class wasp in Ziggy Spicehandler's film, Different. Mortimer's trendy wife, Joyce, begins an affair with the more exotic Ziggy. Ziggy's attempts to console Mortimer turn the dialogue into brilliant satire:

"Things just happen," he said, his smile aching with concern. "Life is meaningless. Totally absurd."

"Is it?"

"In the long run, we'll all be dead, you know."<sup>20</sup>

Richler attacks such existential pretensions of these angst-ridden swingers with such enthusiasm and dexterity that some readers have mistakenly taken Mortimer as an anti-existential hero:

Yes, yes, Mortimer thought, a good credit risk, that's me. Loyal. Hardworking. Honest. Liberal. The well-dressed fellow on the bench in Zoo Story. The virtues I

was raised to believe in have become pernicious. Contemporary writing, he thought, is clawing at my balls, making me repugnant to myself. An eyesore. "Protestant," he said aloud. "White Anglo-Saxon Protestant filth, that's what you are."<sup>21</sup>

Yes, all the "Loyal, Hardworking, Honest, Liberal" readers say, and urge Mortimer to put all those swingers in their place. Alas he fails, and not just for choosing the wrong reel to wind into the projector of Polly Morgan's mind. Mortimer keeps wicked company, but he aspires to their acceptance and affection. One cannot possibly interpret his death as the tragic fall of the individual in defiant battle with corporate madness. Rather, Mortimer is merely a weaker and slightly alien member of his society, not an alternative to it.

The irony works both ways - against a society that abuses him and against Mortimer himself. In a way, Richler's relationship to Mortimer comes perilously close to the shifting relationship of Swift and Gulliver, the source of a long-standing academic feuding between the ironic camp and the traditionalists. But in the case of Cocksure the issue is perhaps a little clearer. For Mortimer is after all too decidedly middle-class to be Richler's spokesman. "A cesspool of received ideas",<sup>22</sup> Joyce's description, is putting it a little strongly, but

there is much that is foolishly and naïvely bourgeois about Mortimer. The tension between his childhood values and the values of his society time and again reduce Mortimer to a crippling ambivalence. He has to conceal his desire to celebrate Christmas with the lie of infidelity. His moral and sexual dilemma with the coloured girl at the bank, and his concern lest Ziggy taunt him at the orderliness of his bookshelves, contrive to make him absurd. His sexual anxiety makes a fine ironic contrast to the title, and his sense of sexual inferiority to various ethnic groups is too burlesque to leave Mortimer with much dignity.

This absence of any clear-cut moral good has disturbed many readers of Cocksure. The generalized unattractiveness of the main characters holds Richler onto a cynical and relentlessly devaluing tone. This is indeed a shift for Richler, for while much of his work revels in a cynicism near to bad taste, all previous works end on a somewhat affirming note through comic resolution. Admittedly, the spirit of affirmation is much restricted and dogged with potential disaster, but Richler has always closed on some achievement - birth in The Acrobats, Noah's escape in Son of a Smaller Hero, marriage in A Choice of Enemies, Duddy's purchase in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz - usually linked with a

comic resolution. In these novels the reader is forced to an ambivalent perception. The action is comic but the tears are barely hidden. In Cocksure, on the other hand, the final action is Mortimer's death, and the reader is asked to smile.

Amidst this moral confusion, Frye's work on Menippean satire once again proves helpful:

Menippus, the founder of the Menippean satire, was a cynic, and cynics are generally associated with the role of intellectual Thersites.<sup>2 3</sup>

Some element of cynicism then, is endemic to the form. Since this is the case, Richler is just writing within his tradition, not as he is sometimes condemned, writing against the novelist's moral point of view. Still, a revelation of this sort will not dispel all objections to cynicism, particularly for readers who find cynicism a demeaning and facile intellectual position. But perhaps at least some of the blame should be shifted from Richler and onto the limitations of his chosen form, Menippean satire.

Having granted, similar in manner to retreat, that much of Cocksure is nihilistic in tone, it only remains to draw a final line of defense. For the reader well-versed in Richler, there is an implicit position, a



critical humanism of authorial tone that moves to restore proportions to a human perspective. In all his work Richler fluctuates between the ironic possibility that there is nothing worth taking very seriously and the hope that perhaps there is something of considerable value, if man could only find out what it is. Richler finally settles on a sense of life as it is lived, that curious compromise containing both tragic and comic possibility, as having its own worth. Richler's insistence on the finite and limited nature of human existence, puts him at odds with the grand hopes of contemporary programmists. In ideological confidence, Richler says, the programmists have gone beyond human scale.

Everyone smiles at the sexual innuendo of the title, but there is an even simpler translation, pride. Cocksure is a grotesque and nasty book, but a grotesque that is a call to order, back to human scale. The Marcusean wedding of the polymorphous perverse and the dictatorship of the proletariat raises false hopes and makes false promises. But on the other side of the barricade lies the triumph of liberal technology, purely efficient and mechanically amoral. As Dean Swift is not Gulliver, Richler is not Mortimer. So the reader is left, like Richler himself, on weak and shifting ground. But if all directions are not clear, a certain emphasis is heard.

That emphasis is of course, on the measured possibilities of the human scale, and in this way, Cocksure, Richler's blackest work, aims at an old target and traditional enemy of all satire, Pride.

Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>William H. New, "Cock and Bull Stories," Canadian Literature, No. 39 (Winter 1969), pp. 83-6.
- <sup>2</sup>"Wasp, Where is Thy Sting?" Times Literary Supplement, May 16, 1968, 497.
- <sup>3</sup>Patrick Coleman, "Cocksure," Our Generation, Vol. 6, No. 3, 150-4.
- <sup>4</sup>Urjo Kareda, "Banned in Britain," Toronto Daily Star, 1 June, 1968, p. 29.
- <sup>5</sup>Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 224.
- <sup>6</sup>George Woodcock, Mordecai Richler, Canadian Writers, No. 6 (McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 55.
- <sup>7</sup>Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 309
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 309-12.
- <sup>9</sup>W. E. Yeomans, "The Houyhnhnm as Menippean Horse," College English, 27, No. 6, (March 1966), 450.
- <sup>10</sup>Mordecai Richler, Cocksure, (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), p. 110.
- <sup>11</sup>Mordecai Richler, Cocksure, p. 17.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 120.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 8.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>17</sup>Leslie Fiedler, "Some Notes on the Jewish Novel in English: or Looking Backward from Exile," The Running Man, 1, No. 2 (July - Aug. 1968), 21.

<sup>18</sup>George Woodcock, Mordecai Richler, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup>Richler, Cocksure, p. 211.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>23</sup>Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 230.

CHAPTER VI

ST. URBAIN'S HORSEMAN

Finding the nihilism of Cocksure an ultimately unliveable attitude, Mordecai Richler heads for new ground in St. Urbain's Horseman. Yet the new ground is somehow familiar, as St. Urbain's Horseman sums up previous work. All modes of comedy, from the most delicate irony to militant satire are fused in an overall comic framework. The action takes place in London, Montreal, and Israel, fusing locations Richler has previously kept separate in any one novel. Duddy Kravitz re-appears, a middle-aged millionaire, with the same combination of ruthlessness and charm. There is the familiar Richler ability to write marvellous set pieces, although in St. Urbain's Horseman, the set pieces, such as the baseball game, are more brilliantly executed than ever before, and truly belong in a great novel.

After the grotesques of The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure, the reader may be surprised that Richler asks the reader to take his protagonist seriously. Jake Hersh is no comic-strip caricature, but a fully developed character who tries to make sense out of his life with the confusing information he has at his disposal about that life. And make sense out of it he does, as Richler returns to a basically comic and therefore affirming mode.

The importance of "finding something to say yes to" is emphasized by the epigraph:

Defenceless under the night  
 Our world in a stupor lies;  
 Yet, dotted everywhere,  
 Ironic points of light  
 Flash out wherever the just  
 Exchange their messages:  
 May I, composed like them  
 Of Eros and of dust,  
 Beleaguered by the same  
 Negation and despair,  
 Show an affirming flame.

But affirmation is a conclusion that Richler comes to only after much pessimistic contemplation of Jake's world.

Jake worries with Dr. Johnson that his life has been "nothing but a barren waste of time, with some disorders of the body and disturbances of the mind very near to madness."<sup>1</sup> His wife Nancy understands the contradictions within Jake:

Ostensibly consumed by overweening ambition, he was, on black days, filled with self-hatred and debilitating doubts, largely because he took himself to be an impostor and his work, given its fragile nature, a con. She began to wonder why he had chosen to become a director in the first place and feared, in agonizingly lucid moments, that if he did not rise as far as he hoped, he might yet diminish into bitterness.<sup>2</sup>

As a rare compensation for self-doubt, Jake is happily

married. With three children and a wife who can still excite him after ten years of marriage Jake has more than most protagonists in modern literature. But more can sometimes mean less, as Jake's happy marriage denies him the right to angst-ridden promiscuity, so deliciously savoured by his film friends. Too comfortable to do anything but occasionally envy his friends' adventurous couplings, Jake is more often amused at their antics. But the enjoyment of his friends and the happiness in his wife and family do not make Jake secure.

Jake fears the outside world, the public realm of war, famine, and brutality. It is the world of modern barbarism, and in his nightmares obtrude the sinister shapes of SS monsters come to smash the puppy dreams of Hampstead cottagers. Jake suspects the innocence of his domestic happiness:

The times were depraved. Tenderness in one house, he had come to fear, was no more possible, without corruption, than socialism in a single country.<sup>3</sup>

So Jake awaits the coming of the vandals. The starvelings of India and Africa, or fanatical purgers, like the Red Guards, will surely come to his house seeking vengeance for his bourgeois affluence. Or the ghosts of concentration camp survivors, captured through photographs in his



attic, will come to life and ask for his contribution. If not the down-trodden and the suffering, then surely some hideous fascist revival will come to remind his children of their inheritance, a heritage that reaches back to the pogroms and the camps.

If the "times are depraved", Jake has little hope in the ability of his generation to improve matters. The problem, Jake feels, is that they were always observers of others' battles, never participants. His generation is untried:

If, as secure and snotty ten-year olds, they mocked those cousins and uncles who were too prudent to enlist, then it was an apprenticeship appropriate to encroaching middle age, when they were to exhort younger men to burn their draft cards. From pint-size needlers, callow fans in the wartime bleachers, they had matured to moral coaches, the instigators of petitions, without ever having been tried on the field themselves.<sup>4</sup>

This sentiment, and it is a Richler sentiment as well as a Jake sentiment, can be read as adolescent envy of the older cousins and uncles who did enlist, the boy's nostalgia for a world his war comics and Saturday matinees depicted.

But Richler is too complicated to suffer from a simple case of envy over a battle scar. Not always deprecating about his generation, Jake feels that their

role has been unjustly pushed upon them by something more impersonal than weakness, more like history:

Unwillingly, without justice, they had been cast in Kerensky's role. Neither as obscene as the Czar, nor as bloodthirsty as Lenin. Even as Jews, they did not fit a mythology. Not having gone like sheep to the slaughterhouse, but also too fastidious to punish Arab villages with napalm.<sup>5</sup>

The moral question is clear, but the answer, if there is one, is shrouded in ambivalence. Can a man be happy in his desirable but commonplace domestic refuge, if his neighbour starves. Indeed, if one agrees with Plato on the vital connection between happiness and justice, can a man be considered either happy or just if he does not take action to redress the suffering of his world.

Jake's problem has something to do with time, or more properly the juxtaposition of events of such a qualitatively different order that they seem to belong to different species of time. One species of time has to do with Jake's normal family life, the other with the hour when the cruellest imaginings are transferred into violence on human flesh. Richler writes extremely well of both orders, and the juxtaposition of them helps to explain Jake's anguish;

Roast rib of beef and baked potatoes, salad, cheese and wine. He reclines on the sofa, freshly ground coffee set before him, brandy in a snifter; he is overcome with langour, but trying to grasp whatever script he is considering. Nancy's curled into an armchair, legs tucked under, listening to David Oistrakh play a Mozart concerto. Catching up on the Sunday newspapers at last, she tears out a recipe or an article on herbaceous borders made easy. Or she deliberates over the latest National Film Theatre program, knowing exactly what he wants to see. Curly-haired Sammy is lying on his stomach on the floor, fist jammed against his chin, blue eyes pensive, contemplating his jigsaw puzzle. Crayoning, Molly frowns. Only Ben isn't there. He's adrift in his bassinet, stoned on mother's milk. Once the children have been tucked in for the night and should his lethargy pass, he will rouse Nancy, caressing her, and they will climb to the bedroom to make love, pausing by the maid's door to say good-night. She will flatter him in bed and he does not feel comparison-shopped. They come together. Afterwards, they plan holidays. Shall it be the Costa Brava this summer or the Loire Valley? Other, less fortunate, marriages will be a subject for self-satisfied speculation. Friends will be forgiven their inadequacies.<sup>6</sup>

But Jake is haunted by another vision, of a time when:

. . . The women often lapped up their food like dogs; the only source of water was right next to the latrine, and this thin stream also served to wash away the excrement. There the woman stood and drank or tried to take a little water with them in some container while next to them their fellow sufferers sat on the latrines. And throughout it all the female guards hit them with clubs. And while this was going on the SS walked up and down and

watched.<sup>7</sup>

The ordinary imagination balks at the task of reconciling the two vastly different orders of experience. While most people reject the more brutal version of the world, Jake has the rare neurotic ability to hold both orders in suspension, an ability that locks Jake in ambivalence.

Yet the only prospect for ending ambivalence, it seems to Jake, is the unwelcome prospect of his own death. And death relentlessly stalks Jake's imagination. Although given to erotic fantasies of adolescent exaggeration, Jake distrusts his body as his ultimate betrayer. Too skeptical to worship his own orifices Jake instead probes them behind the locked bathroom door, checking on hemorrhoids, looking for cancer. His beloved Nancy sometimes kisses him in her sleep, her occasional sleepy-sour breath bringing messages of decay beneath the wasting flesh. Her death, his death, it was all so banal, so commonplace, yet always terrifying.

Jake's soul is an ambivalent mixture of "Eros and dust," but somewhere the soul craves a synthesis, a conclusion. Out of the existential handbook, Lucas Scott, Jake's friend and rival for success, remarks that: "If we're all on the Titanic, at least I'm going down first class."<sup>8</sup> There is little solace for Jake,

however, in Luke's decadence. For Jake believes in heroes, in the individuality of those who come closest to the sun. At one point in the novel Jake confesses that he uses Dr. Samuel Johnson as a kind of moral touchstone:

"You know what's important to me? Really, really important to me? Dr. Samuel Johnson. I keep wondering, if I had lived in his time, would he have liked me? Would Dr. Johnson have invited me to sit at his table?"<sup>9</sup>

There is something permanent and unassailable in Dr. Johnson's contribution, a contribution that seems to transcend the daily puzzlement in the flesh of the rest of mortality. Would Dr. Johnson have approved of me, Jake wonders? Without God, Jake seeks a permanent anchor in heroic men and good deeds.

From his boyhood in St. Urbain, Jake is haunted by the image of a different kind of hero, his cousin Joey Hersh. Joey who drove a red MG, who was bronzed as a lifeguard, who had a pilot's license and knew how to ride, who knew the most elegant women St. Urbain's had ever seen, Joey was a challenge to the rest of St. Urbain society. The other men lived in a world of pay-offs and compromises, insurance scandals and black market deals. Joey, on the other hand, lived unafraid of creditor, bailiff, or policeman. He was his own man in

a way that no one else dared to be, and, as such, daily challenged the men of the community, and by his very presence called them cowards. After the beating of a Jewish youth by French-Canadian toughs, Joey's influence is strong enough to coerce half-a-dozen men to accompany him on a revenge raid. Their victim, however, was well connected, and the merchants soon find themselves harassed and menaced by police and city hall, paying the price for their one and only venture into bravado. The price is too high, and the community leaders betray Joey. By the next morning Joey had been driven out of town, his car abandoned and gutted on the road to New York.

Jake is profoundly influenced by his brief exposure to Joey's heroics. From the Jewish champion of St. Urbain's, Joey becomes a Jewish avenger, hunting for Nazi war criminals, in particular the grisly Dr. Mengele:

. . . Jake imagined the avenging Horseman seeking out the villa with the barred windows off an unmarked road in the jungle, between Puerto San Vicente and the border fortress of Carlos Antonio López, on the Paraná River.

Joey, Joey.

In his mind's eye, Jake saw him cantering on a magnificent Plevin stallion. Galloping, thundering. Planning fresh campaigns, more daring maneuvers.<sup>10</sup>

Jake becomes obsessed with the heroic standard set by

The Horseman. He defends him to his family, keeps a journal of his activities, and even tries to find him.

Finally Joey becomes Jake's censoring angel:

. . . he realized that ever since he had turned down the film in Israel because, to his mind, it was an offense against everything his cousin stood for, the Horseman had become his moral editor. Considering a script, deliberating for days as was his habit, consulting Nancy, arguing with himself, vacillating, reading and rereading, he knew that in the final analysis he said yes or no based on what he imagined to be the Horseman's exacting standard. Going into production, whether in television or film, he tried above all to please the Horseman. For somewhere he was watching, judging.<sup>11</sup>

Jake is Joey's acolyte, but his own moral test constitutes a parody of the Horseman's confrontations. From the beginning, Jake fearfully waits for the outer, brutalized world to intrude on his happy domesticity. The issues are finally joined, comically, with Jake's trial for various sexual offences, sexual offences against a German au pair girl which he did not commit. Despite his generalized mutterings about revenge on the Germans throughout the novel, Jake with characteristic liberal distaste, cannot bring himself to humiliate or assault the au pair girl.

Jake's guilty partner in court, Harry Stein, is a splendid study of low-life bitterness. Harry, a proven

high I.Q. member of Mensa, drips with envy of those less talented, but more successful. Harry, unlike Jake, is unencumbered by guilt and finds no trouble in seeking revenge. Quite often it is a petty revenge, such as an obscene telephone call, but he is equipped with a low cunning and resolute viciousness that makes him more than a match for Jake. Yet Jake enjoys Harry immensely and seeks his company for other reasons than his obvious guilt. On the one hand, Jake admires the heroics of the Horseman, and aspires to the ideal, but on the other, he is fascinated by the vicious consistency of bitterness that he finds in Harry. Following the trial of the Horseman, Jake finds Ruthy, one of Joey's conquests, and through Ruthy Jake meets Harry. The two, Joey and Harry, are related. Seek one and find the other. For while Joey is the good angel, Harry is Jake's evil angel.

This very connection calls into doubt Joey's true worth. A central structural symbol, like the Star-Maker in Cocksure, the Horseman remains an ambiguous property in the novel. Obviously the Horseman is a symbol of romance and heroism, but his heroic value is undermined by the tawdry quality of his achievements. A professional ballplayer who could not stay in the big leagues, an "actor" who rode as an extra with Randolph Scott, Joey has too much of the diletante about him. With Jake's



discovery that he is a gambler and a gigilo, Joey begins to take on shades of the "Boy Wonder". Re-arranging his information at the end of the novel, Jake wonders:

Why did he return to Montreal? He came to fuck me, Jenny said. "If he is hunting this Nazi down and finds him," Uncle Abe shouted, "he won't kill him, he'll blackmail him." What if the Horseman was a distorting mirror and we each took the self-justifying image we required of him?<sup>12</sup>

For most of the novel Jake sorely needs him, for the Horseman promises a better life. Not that Jake is unhappy, rather he is incomplete. Reality eludes his ambitions. At one point in the novel Jake good-humouredly reflects that:

. . . if I die before I wake, and the Lord my soul does take, I will be buried without ever having directed Olivier, had a black girl, seen Jerusalem, delivered my speech turning down the Academy Award, tried heroin, fought for a cause, owned a cabin cruiser, had a son, been a prime minister, given up smoking, met Mao, had a homosexual experience, made a film of the Benye Krick stories, rejected a knighthood, had two ravishing girls in my bed at the same time, killed a Nazi, brought Hanna to London, sailed first class on the île de France, cast Lauren Bacall in a thriller, met Evelyn Waugh, read Proust, come four times in a night (do they, really?) or had a season of my films presented at the National Film Theatre.<sup>13</sup>

In a less good-humoured mood, Jake envies his friend

Luke's success, and nurses an old grudge against him with all the stingy lack of generosity of a Harry Stein.

Jake's life is incomplete in a more serious way. All children are told enough heroic stories for the standards of romance to insinuate themselves into the growing psyche. One can imagine Jake's childish heroes fading into the background as he matures, leaving him on center stage, terrified, to continue the heroic drama. As the heroes fade, Jake's quivering self, with its intimate knowledge of mortality, realizes the insufficiency of flesh to play the hero's part. Somehow life is cheapened, the myths one dreams by are unravelled, and there is nowhere a complete life to aim for. Jake had once thought of London as a magic centre of the world where reputations made were reputations deserved. Upon coming to London however, Jake finds it less than magic, far too full of inflated egos, falseness and compromise:

He would have preferred, for instance, that the highly regarded Timothy Nash had been worthy of his reputation and that it was utterly impossible for Jacob Hersh to be as good. He would have been happiest had the capital's standards not been so readily attainable and that it were still possible for him to have icons.<sup>14</sup>

To run out of dreams and to settle for life is growing up, but there is little solace in this knowledge.

Literature, once his consolation, was no longer enough. To read of meanness in others, promiscuity well observed or greed understood, to discover his own inadequacies shared no longer licensed them, any more than all the deaths that had come before could begin to make his own endurable.

Oh, Horseman, Horseman, where are you?<sup>15</sup>

For most of the novel Jake takes nothing but the Horseman seriously. He pays nodding attention to his predicament and his wife's embarrassment, but in actuality, he is an amused spectator of his own life. It is his movie, and he enjoys it, but every once in a while, from somewhere off the comic screen, come rumours of life and death. His father dies of cancer. His mother weeps for a son that is no longer hers. Harry is grossly mistreated at the hands of the court. Jake cannot take life seriously until his dream of the Horseman is taken away, as it is in the final sobering movement of the novel, when Jake learns of the Horseman's death. The shock forces Jake to attempt a final reassessment. He fires Joey's gun, which turns out to be a blank pistol. He repeats God's commandment forbidding the worship of false gods. He weeps for his father, his maker, rotting in a casket. He weeps for his mother, who deserves a more loving son. He weeps for Harry, grieving in his cell. He weeps for Nancy, who is ashamed of the marks

of childbearing and thinks herself no longer attractive. He weeps for the god that died, for the loss of innocence. But belief dies hard and struggles to stay alive. He weeps for the ideal that is no more:

Unless, he thought, pouring himself a brandy at his desk, I become the Horseman now. I seek out the villa with the barred windows off the unmarked road in the jungle, between Puerto San Vicente and the border fortress of Carlos Antonio López, on the Paraná River. I will be St. Urbain's avenging Horseman. If, a more skeptical voice intruded, there ever was one.<sup>16</sup>

Jake celebrates his return to the land of the living with Nancy and Luke. Tentatively, Jake mends his feud with Luke and agrees to direct his new script. Nancy and Luke share their concern for his well-being, and anxiously hope that Jake is rid of his fantasy demon.

And he almost is rid of him. Except that now, in his nightmare, Jake is the Horseman, astride the white stallion, taking the burden of justice from Joey, seeking Mengele. Throughout the novel Richler quotes Isaac Babel: "When a Jew gets on a horse he stops being a Jew . . ." <sup>17</sup> Perhaps it is because the rider is complete, complete in his mastery of something noble, that he stops being Jewish or Canadian or English or even human. For a moment, he is heroic, therefore above human categories. For those

who walk he is kin to those strange angels of power that stalk dark regions of the soul, mythic symbols that frighten and inspire, angels that surface riding on the currents of wind or the winged feet of horses.

At the end of the novel Jake is in the daylight of reduced neurosis; he has joined the land of the living, the cheerful compromisers, but the openness of the ending suggests that Jake will always fluctuate between acceptance of what he has and the desire to ride the ideal. After his nightmare casts Jake as the Horseman, Jake retrieves the Horseman's journal, finds the entry, "died July 20, 1967, in an air crash," crosses it out and writes in over it "presumed dead."<sup>18</sup> Richler, a skeptical but humane critic of romanticism, may finally side with those who walk, for in walking lies the truth and humour of limitation. But Richler also understands the heroic urgings of the soul, with its message to ride.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Mordecai Richler, St. Urbain's Horseman, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Mordecai Richler, St. Urbain's Horseman, p. 228.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 86

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 464.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 464.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 467.

CHAPTER VII

HUNTING TIGERS UNDER GLASS

As Warren Tallman suggests, Mordecai Richler has an essentially aristocratic notion of the novelist's function. For Richler, time away from the novel, as in the self-publicity of Mailer, Baldwin, or Algren, is a self-indulgent, diminishing waste. Richler seems to prefer the quieter profile of the serious novelist, like Bellow, whose Herzog he so much admires. Yet this "high" conception of the novelist's duty is modified by Richler's healthy grasp of the practical. He spends frequent periods of time away from fiction, for the writing of essays and film scripts. Film writing represents profit, a simultaneously frustrating and amusing four months, with sufficient financial reward to gain perhaps an uninterrupted year of writing. The essays represent time out too, with the essential difference that they are written for Richler's own pleasure as well. Perhaps they reflect a desire on the part of the socially-conscious Richler to sustain some sort of dialogue with his public.

The best examples of Richler's part in the dialogue may be found in the collection, Hunting Tigers Under Glass. As a means of fleshing out the man behind the novels, and the ideas behind the fiction, the collection



serves admirably. The essays deal with literary, Jewish and Canadian experience, elements common to the novels.

More importantly, perhaps, Hunting Tigers Under Glass shares the fiction's tone of voice - a certain consistent scepticism. When self-regard or special pleading shows itself, "whether by Canadian sports writers in Stockholm, kibbutzniks in Galilee, or proliferating Canada culture boosters"<sup>1</sup> Richler feels compelled to attack. Sometimes, as in the essays "With the Trail Smoke-Eaters in Stockholm" and "The Catskills" the attack consists of good-natured prodding. "This Year in Jerusalem", however, is done in a "high" style; it is serious in intention and execution, with the menace of a major critique.

Richler's literary career has been a slow process of definition. Richler has written through and beyond the romantic novels of his early period, the novels of anguished search for meaning - The Acrobats, Son of A Smaller Hero, and A Choice of Enemies. The ironic tracing of myth in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz initiated an involvement with fantasy. Fantasy was later to be used as the base for satire, the bitter, personal satire of The Incomparable Atuk, and the more intelligent and devastating satire of Cocksure. As a collection, Hunting

Tigers Under Glass reveals Richler's conclusions during the 60's. Again and again the stress falls on man's essential weakness and folly. This is not to say that the dominant tone is sombre. Much of it is playful, particularly on such subjects as Jews in sport or why Clark Kent is a Canadian. But, in his more serious moments, as in "This Year in Jerusalem", the residing spirit is a gentle melancholy. Richler greatly sympathizes with the disillusioned, while reserving his criticism for those who brashly expect to successfully resist the laws of experience.

Still, Richler's criticism provokes a defensive and misunderstanding response. A member of a suburban synagogue asks:

"Why is it that everybody loved Sholem Aleichem, but we all hate you? Because you're a stinker who writes garbage about your people."<sup>2</sup>

Richler has been accused of "putting the skids under Canada." Occasionally, in diverting inversion of response,

A Jewish reader will protest against my attitude to things Canadian. "Don't they hate us enough, the bastards, without you making fun, stirring them up . . ."  
Or a liberal Gentile reader will deplore my outlook on Jewish matters. "It makes it so much harder for we poor deluded Jewish apologists to defend the Jews against the various charges traditionally laid against them by anti-semites . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Such remarks, while showing a misunderstanding of Richler, reveal the almost perverse quality of Richler's position. Although he has been closely affiliated with left-wing politics, much of Richler's fiction involves a critique of Marxism. Richler is closely tied to his Jewish experience, yet he feels compelled to mock its follies. While he holds considerable affection for Canada, he is well-known for his anti-Canadian remarks. Richler begins to explain his position in his introduction:

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. . . . 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.<sup>4</sup>

Richler is not trying to forget his Canadian-Jewish background. Indeed, his roots are too deeply struck for that. But he does find himself at odds with group prejudices, and to this extent he is detached from his background. With this detachment of subject from object (Richler from Canada, Richler from Jewishness, and Richler from socialism), an ironic perspective naturally accrues. This ironic self finds that the group enemies are not the real enemies. Rather, stupidity

and inhumanity loom as the real threats on either side of the barricade, border, or ghetto.

Nonetheless, Richler speculates that perhaps his timing is wrong? In a time of brinkmanship politics in the Middle East, some would "consider it in exceedingly bad taste to publish criticisms of Israel."<sup>5</sup> In a time of shaky self-assertion and anxious concern for Canada's future, many people feel that Richler has betrayed the identity-shaping purpose of the Canadian intellectual. Yet it is precisely in times of crisis that Richler insists on the necessity of criticism. The moment when solidarity becomes the highest group aim coincides with the moment when the group allows itself to be inhuman to those outside itself. Therefore, Richler insists on the higher priority of critical independence, an alien position, defended solely by wit, but a natural position for the satirist.

Richler is consistently independent in his attitude to his own work. As pride is the root sin, pride is the satirist's main target, and Richler is concerned with keeping a healthy and humble sense of perspective:

I fervently believe that all a writer should send into the market-place to be judged is his own work; the rest should remain private. I deplore the writer as a personality, however large and undoubted the talent, as is the case with Norman Mailer. I also do not believe in special

license for the so-called artistic temperament. After all, basically, my problems, as I grudgingly come within spitting distance of middle age, are the same as anybody else's. Easier maybe. I can bend my anxieties to subversive uses. Making stories of them. When I'm not writing, I'm a husband and a father of five. Worried about air pollution. The population explosion. My sons' report cards.<sup>6</sup>

In marked contrast, Mailer lives publicly. In Advertisements For Myself, Mailer felt that he was imprisoned with a perception that would settle for nothing less than making a revolution in the consciousness of his time. And he tried to live in a revolutionary way, at the head of a literary pack. But the pack refused to acknowledge Mailer's leadership, and gifted writers fell to the waste of personal feuding. James Baldwin suggests that the source of his trouble with Mailer was "the toughest kid on the block meeting the toughest kid on the block."<sup>7</sup> Other contenders soon arrived on the scene, "The Original Original Toughest Kid On The Block was heard from: Nelson Algren."<sup>8</sup> Richler, in quiet dissent, goes on to suggest that the real job is done more privately and more humbly and that "while the toughest kids on the block were brawling under an Esquire street lamp, the men were sitting inside writing novels. Like Herzog."<sup>9</sup>

Richler writes of a Mailer lecture at the Mayfair

Theatre. It seems to have been one of those occasions when the lecturer felt compelled to psychoanalyse the Twentieth Century, and went on to prescribe its therapeutic solution, something like being brave in bed. Richler tries to be generous, and wishes to avoid the ugly self-satisfaction that follows hard on the heels of someone else's self-exhibition. Richler's sense of the inevitability of limitation, of the fettered ego, distances him from Mailer's sense of the heroic. Mailer, the romantic rebel, confident, abrasive and tendentious, receives ironic treatment from Richler in a description that subtly shifts from condescension to sympathy:

I could hear the self-inflated, innocent programmist going on and on about a sexual revolution but what I saw was a warm chunky man of forty-two who was really saying that screwing today wasn't nearly as satisfying as when he was a kid and that, like the rest of us, he suffered sourness and insults in and out of bed, and wasn't it a shame, a bloody shame.<sup>10</sup>

In the essay on Malamud, Richler uses Malamud's quotation of Melville: "To produce a mighty book you must choose a mighty theme."<sup>11</sup> Richler wonders if the "mighty theme" does not overshadow the dramatic life of The Fixer:

. . . rich in invention, surprisingly comic at times, seldom tract-like,

always a pleasure to read in spite of the sickening subject matter. It is a worthy novel, maybe even a noble one, but in the end, unlike The Assistant of the splendid stories in The Magic Barrel, the novel is curiously without an inner life, a will of its own. The Fixer, it seems to me, is a novel forced in the humanist's greenhouse.<sup>12</sup>

While such criticism can be justifiably levelled at his own earlier work, the post-Duddy Kravitz Richler is entitled to direct such a charge elsewhere. Disturbed lest Malamud strain to seek out more mighty themes, Richler writes:

Malamud has now done his duty by the "mighty theme," and one hopes that he will now return to chronicles of the "fleas" of his time, a form in which he is most likely to leave us with an enduring work.<sup>13</sup>

Although he eschews "mighty themes" in the Malamud essay, Richler involves himself in a minor contradiction elsewhere. In both The Acrobats and A Choice of Enemies runs the lament that the age of heroes is over, that the Spanish Civil War was the last time that one could take sides. Yet Nathan Cohen points out the fact that Richler was the merest youngster when it happened.<sup>14</sup> The fact that Richler was not hooked into the main Marxist surge is vital to an understanding of his relationship to Marxism. Like that of many North American Marxists,

Richler's attachment is largely sentimental. While many did go to Spain it is also true that many more found themselves cheering the others off, remaining more comfortable a little closer to home. The truth of the matter is that in North America, unlike Europe, Marxism did not have the faintest chance at power. Curiously without political substance, without that peculiar sense of being propitiously there, ready to struggle, in fact, ready to take over, North American Marxism was more properly Marxianity, an essentially religious and moral myth built around a metaphor of revolutionary apocalypse. So in one sense, it does not really matter if Richler was never directly involved; very few in North America were. Spain was sentimental - a symbol, in an age of angst, of a more heroic era. It was the last occasion for "great" and "mighty" themes. Now is the time for the "chronicles of fleas." If Malamud's The Fixer was forced in the "humanist's greenhouse," so too, is Richler's sentimental enlargement of Spain. His regret over the shrinking of purpose, his nostalgia for the grander conception, is almost painfully recorded in "Paper Lion".

An earlier generation of American writers had to test themselves not against Bart Starr and Archie Moore, but the Spanish Civil War and the Moscow trials.



In Europe, Isaac Babel, looking for a change, rode with the Red Cavalry. George Orwell went to Wigan Pier and then Catalonia. Koestler came out of Spain with his Spanish Testament. This is not meant to be an attack on Plimpton, but all of us, Plimpton's generation and mine. One day, I fear, we will be put down as a trivial, peripheral bunch. Crazy about bad old movies, nostalgic for comic books. Our gods don't fail. At worst, they grow infirm. They suffer pinched nerves, like Paul Hornung. Or arthritic arms, like Sandy Koufax.<sup>15</sup>

On the subject of the Canadian search for gods and myths, however, there is little of this sentimentality. In writing of Expo, Richler finds Canadians,

. . . demanding an alarmingly high emotional return from what is after all only a world's fair. A good one, maybe even the most enjoyable one ever. However, within it there lies merely the stuff of a future nostalgic musical, not the myth out of which a nation is forged. Unless it is to be a Good Taste Disneyland.<sup>16</sup>

Richler treads on the most sensitive Canadian anxieties with an irreverent glee. His vigorous independence from current trends allows him to make deprecating jokes about French-Canadians, referring to them as "Pepsis". The low-comedy of Canadian cultural posturing provokes Richler to the following response:

So, during my year in Canada, I've been told again and again that more poetry is published here than in any other

English-speaking country, which is to say our sensitive plants, like our prairie farmers, are over-producing, their stanzas as difficult to export as wheat.

.....

The National Arts Center will survive its first night. It's ours now, out there in Ottawa, bedazzling, with three fabulously well-equipped theatres. As things stand, a sort of Yankee Stadium without Babe Ruth.<sup>17</sup>

It is not exactly the support hoped for by Canada's struggling artistic clique, but the above passage re-asserts Richler's refusal to join a mindless chorus of superlatives.

In the main, Richler's writing on Canada is good-natured. Asked why he had left Canada, Richler responds:

I daren't tell her that I had no girlfriends. That having been born dirty-minded I had thought in London maybe, in Paris certainly, the girls. . . . Instead, I say, "Well, it was a cultural desert, wasn't it? In London, I could see the Sadlers Wells Ballet, plays by Terence Rattigan. If overcome with a need to see the Popular Stars of Prague, I could hop on a plane and jolly well see them. In their natural environment."<sup>18</sup>

Underneath this kidding lies a sincere affection and concern for Canada. Even the independent Richler is susceptible to the current intellectual trend, as he admits in Saturday Night that "the time to rally round the flag may finally have come,"<sup>19</sup> Richler explains his

slow adjustment to this position:

Like most Canadians of my generation I was raised to think of New York as our cultural capital. New York, New York, our heart's desire. Everything we valued culturally sprang from Manhattan's breast, and there was nothing to match the exhilaration of a trip to New York. But over the last ten years, trips to New York have been a diminishing delight and, to come clean, this time out I found the city exceedingly oppressive, even brutalized, and I was overjoyed to make it back to Montreal without having been mugged.<sup>20</sup>

And so Richler now finds himself grateful for the Canadian cultural lag, if only because that lag suggests a reprieve from the present American malaise. Thus, time gives Canadians an opportunity to avoid the emulation of the American experience. Richler calls for more nationalism and enters into the spirit of solidarity by requesting less "left-wing malice." He troops in behind the familiar nationalist programme with its stress on economic independence, a vital CBC, and an acceptable national magazine. Always with reservations, Richler pleads for less chauvinistic support for Canadian mediocrity, less of the "old and familiar jingoism tarted-up"<sup>21</sup>, and asks for a new "nationalism informed by intelligence" under whose flag he may finally rally.

There is something of the same light touch on the subject of the Catskills as on Canada. The writing is

good-humoured and ironic, without the militancy or urgency of satire. Richler is very careful to catch precisely the right tone on the Catskills:

I suppose it would be easiest, and not unjustified, to present the Catskills as a cartoon. A Disneyland with knives. After all, everywhere you turn the detail is bizarre.<sup>22</sup>

He does not want the Catskills to appear simply and totally grotesque. But neither must he ignore the outlandish and bizarre quality of the concept, or gloss over the vulgarity with a liberal sentimentality. Richler leaves none of it out, but finally comes down with sympathy. For the guests are in on the joke, and their own sense of self-ridicule is at least as finely tuned as the scorn of their critics. It is almost inevitable that Richler stands up for them - "the most frequently fired at class of American Jews."<sup>23</sup>

The archetypal Grossinger's guest vies with the Mortimer Griffins of the world as the most unfashionable breed of man. Commentary and the Partisan Review await new opportunities to attack:

Saul Bellow is watching, Alfred Kazin is ruminating, Norman Mailer is ready with his flick knife. . . . Was there ever a group so pursued by such an unsentimental platoon of chroniclers? So plagued by moralists? So blamed for making money?<sup>24</sup>

Before the middle-class Jews came the penniless European dreamers - tailors, cutters, corner grocers - so lovingly portrayed by Bernard Malamud. After them came Philip Roth's college crowd, sexually neurotic and trying its hardest to overcome ghetto mentality:

But this generation between, this unlovely spiky bunch that climbed with the rest of middle-class America out of the depression into a pot of prosperity, is the least liked by literary Jews.<sup>25</sup>

And so Richler is irresistably drawn to these "sitting ducks for satire."<sup>26</sup> He understands that their complaints - cancer scares, Israeli bond drives, unmarriageable daughters, and activist sons - are, if clichéd, not necessarily false.

Richler's very real sense of shared mortality sees more than targets in these Catskill exponents of middle-class acquisition. Always suspicious that the trendy categories of friend and enemy are too pat, Richler is at last won over by their sense of proportion. They come to Grossingers and the Concord to revel in their bizarre parade of achievement, but the tone of their parade is self-mocking, and for this Richler forgives small excesses.

The truly great essay in Hunting Tigers Under Glass is "This Year in Jerusalem", the originally projected

title piece. "This Year in Jerusalem" stands out among his other essays as a major and serious statement by a complex humanist. The technique is narrative, and it proceeds through a progress of scenes, now funny, now sad, which swells to a vision of Israel, a vision that reveals as much about Richler as about Israel.

The existence of Israel has a profound significance for Richler: "All my life I seem to have been heading for, and postponing, my trip to Israel."<sup>27</sup> The reader acquainted with Richler will immediately note the ambivalence behind "heading for, and postponing." The habitual pull away from any source of belief is obviously a Richler instinct. But he cannot avoid being fascinated, being pulled toward this new source of belief. There probably is not a Jew anywhere who cannot find a new pride in the fact that Israel exists. As George Steiner writes:

The status of the Jew everywhere has altered a little, the image he carries of himself has a new straightness of back, because Israel has shown that Jews can handle modern weapons, that they can fly jets, and turn desert into orchard. When he is pelted in Argentina or mocked in Kiev, the Jewish child knows that there is a corner of the earth where he is master, where the gun is his. If Israel were to be destroyed, no Jew would escape unscathed.<sup>28</sup>

Richler has a slightly more comic version of the same satisfaction:

If I could put what I felt about Israel into one image I would say the news photo of Ben-Gurion, taken on his arrival in Canada. It shows that grumpy knot of a Polish Jew reviewing an honour guard of Canadian Grenadier Guards. The Guards are standing rigidly at attention; Ben-Gurion's tangle of white hair hardly comes up to their chests. I have held on to that photograph, because of the immense satisfaction it gives me.<sup>29</sup>

But there is something in Richler that wants to hold off the experience of Israel, if not completely, at least at a comfortably detached distance. His reminiscences of the Habonim, in the first few pages, are treated with amused sympathy, as if his earlier Zionist enthusiasms were a type of childhood folly:

When I was in high school I joined Habonim, the Labour-Zionist youth movement. On Friday evenings we listened to impassioned speeches about soil redemption, we saw movies glorifying life on the kibbutz, and danced the hora until our bodies ached. Early Sunday mornings we were out ringing doorbells for the Jewish National Fund, shaking tin boxes under uprooted sleepy faces, righteously demanding quarters, dimes, and nickels to help reclaim our desert in Eretz. Our choir sung stirring songs at fund-raising rallies. In the summertime we went to a camp in a mosquito-ridden Laurentian valley, heard more speakers, studied Hebrew and, in the absence of Arabs, watched out for fishy-looking

### French Canadians.

When fighting broke out in Israel, following the Proclamation of Independence on May 14, 1948, I lied about my age and joined the Canadian Reserve Army, thinking how rich it would be to have Canada train me to fight the British in Eretz, but in the end I decided to finish high school instead.<sup>30</sup>

In a more serious vein Richler establishes his awareness of Israel's problems: the familiar left-right struggle, the Palestinian refugees, the decline of the kibbutz movement, and the hierarchical social structure dominated by Western Jews. This insistence on Israel's difficulties, in addition to an acknowledgment of Israel's triumphs, is vital to Richler's complex relationship to Israel. Like most travellers to Israel, Richler is a pilgrim, but he is a pilgrim with a knowing bias, a suspicion of political heroism and a familiarity with human frailty. He is always detached, and, at times, comically so. Richler, the Canadian living in London, retires to his room in Tel Aviv, turns to the favourite expatriate newspaper, the Herald-Tribune, and informs the reader that Chicago has just taken Montreal in the third game of the Stanley Cup semi-finals. The statement, "Mikita had figured in four goals, Beliveau had done nothing,"<sup>31</sup> becomes an emblem of Richler's isolation. In addition to isolation, however, perhaps it is a



testimony to the eclecticism of his affiliations, involving a simultaneous pull by his Jewish tradition, his Canadian background and his English location. But this eclecticism is a problem in hooking into anyone else's mainstream, particularly that beleaguered and necessarily defensive connection of an Israeli to his homeland.

Israel is vitally connected to mass murder. Its existence was forged and is insured by world guilt, and by Jewish resolve to let it never happen again. But a national birth cannot feed too hungrily on dead bones. As Steiner writes:

Hope and the will to action spring from the capacity of the human mind to forget, from the instinct of necessary oblivion. The Israeli Jew cannot look back too often; his must be the dreams not of night but of day, the forward dreams. Let the dead bury the mounds of the dead. His history is not theirs; it has just begun.<sup>32</sup>

Jewish history has been traced from ghetto to ghetto. The peculiar cast of mind created by the ghetto is the obstacle to confident nation-building that every Israeli, in his new beginning, must overcome. The catastrophe of the concentration camp must become, like a legacy from the shadowy past, a whip to further endeavour. Disaster cannot be a central focus of an ongoing tradition, because, for the Israeli, history begins with the creation

of Israel.

Man's "forward dreams" are optimistic. As Uri Avnery, a left-wing journalist, comments to Richler:

"In London, where you live, everything's been done. Here, we'll see."<sup>33</sup>

But the breast-beating of nation-building can be tedious, despite the obvious worth of the accomplishment:

Elan, an endless run of statistics at his command, went on and on about irrigation, reclamation, and crops. He was tiresome; but the accomplishment was clearly impressive, especially once we started into the desert proper and I could see how desolate the greenery had once been.<sup>34</sup>

Many Israelis are scornful of American-Jewish patronage. The feeling is that the donations merely form payment on guilt, guilt over not settling in Israel, with physical commitment. The middle-aged tourists who come to Israel expect a welcome in line with their donations. But the Israeli resents their motivation, suspecting that they come "to be delighted by Jewish cops, a Jewish army . . ." <sup>35</sup> Richler adopts the role of cranky supporter of American Jewish generosity:

Tiresome, vulgar, rude they might be, but the flawed reality of Israel was a testimony to their generosity.<sup>36</sup>

To the charge that their money is ill-begotten, Richler replies:

If it's ill-begotten, why accept it? And ill-begotten or not there was no reason why they had to give the money to Israel. Whatever their motives - community pressure, the need for prestige, tax exemptions - the result was the same; and they could just as easily have blown the money on a fling.<sup>37</sup>

Israeli militants see the options for Jews as assimilation or settling in Israel. Consequently, there is little nostalgia for their country of origin. Richler questions, somewhat incredulously, Harvey Goodman, a former Canadian:

"Aren't you curious about Clark Street? Wouldn't you like to see it again?"

"The ghetto? Yiddish mommas? The hell."<sup>38</sup>

Bellow, Malamud, and Roth are thought of as ghetto writers. Richler's own ambiguity of viewpoint is in part a product of the ghetto. The curious quality of being a part of and yet "off-center" of any milieu, English, Canadian, or Jewish, is a consistent Richler quality. It is a nuance of relationship, and an appropriate position for the comic artist. But the revolutionary must reject it. And the creation of Israel is a revolutionary act. Israelis, as revolutionaries, must

somehow replace the comic vision, the ghetto vision, with more romantic material. Deeds, not laughter at the human situation, are required. The Israelis and the Diaspora Jews part company here. For the Israeli seeks to replace the history, the time and place of the Diaspora Jew, with a new history, a revolutionary time in an ordained place.

Ironically, Richler travels to Israel to find a new kind of anti-semitism. Repeatedly, he is told that the Israeli is a new kind of Jew, a Jew who does not cringe. In dialogue with a local fisherman, Richler makes his point with humour. The fisherman asks:

"You know why I live here?"

"Don't tell me. It's because you're a new kind of Jew," I said, glaring at the bartender.

"I'm not Tolstoi, I'm not Christ," Bernard said. "I'm just a stinking Jew, but I like my smell."

"You smell like a lousy fisherman to me."

Bernard slapped me on the back again. "I'm a Jew." he bellowed. "Like Freud. Like Einstein."

"The hell you are. You're not a Jew like Freud or a fisherman like St. Peter. You're a fisherman like a fisherman, Bernard."

"I've never liked Canadians."

"Well, I'm a Canadian. Like Maurice Richard."

"You're a stinking Jew. Like me."

"I'm a Canadian Jew."<sup>39</sup>

In a more sombre vein, Richler compares his surprise at anti-semitism with a scene from Arthur Koestler's Darkness at Noon. When Rubashov is in prison, marching up and down the exercise yard, an old Bolshevik marching behind him repeats over and over again, "'This could never happen in a socialist country'. Rubashov hasn't the heart to tell him they're actually in Russia."<sup>40</sup> Always off-center, Richler looks at Canada with the sophistication of the English, looks at England with the humour of the Jew, and looks at Israel with the simplicity of a "Canadian, like Maurice Richard."

However disappointed with Israel Richler may be, he cannot reject it. It is part of his world. And there is always that photograph of Ben-Gurion, and its inevitably satisfying suggestion that the Jews have found a home. A nation bristling with arms may be alien to Richler's spirit, but it is at the same time a source of ambiguous pride. In St. Urbain's Horseman Richler writes:

A man came around to collect from Jake too. Much to his own embarrassment Jake hesitated. Dayan, melodramatic eyepatch and all, was a hero. Our hero. And yet - and yet - put this arrogant general, this Dayan, into an American uniform, call him MacArthur, call him Westmoreland, and Jake would have despised him. Jake wrote out a check, but unhappily. Being the old kind of Jew, a Diaspora Jew, he was bound to feel guilty either way.<sup>41</sup>

The ambiguous response is the heritage of the old kind of Jew, the Jew who knows his history. Steiner, in his essay, "A Kind of Survivor" comments that:

To a man who may tomorrow be in desperate flight across his own border, whose graveyard may be ploughed up and strewn with garbage, the nation-state is an ambiguous haven. Citizenship becomes not an inalienable right, a sacrament of Blut und Boden, but a contract which he must re-negotiate, warily, with each host.<sup>42</sup>

This is not Richler's direct experience, but it is part of his heritage, and his family's recent history. The ghettos of Montreal, without the terror of the ghettos of Europe, still reinforce the notion of separateness. Richler's background prompts him to ask Migdal, "If it was possible that the concept of a nation-state, with all it entailed, was contrary to the real Jewish tradition."

"If you mean," he said, "that we have compromised our lousy Jewish souls here then you're right. This state deals,

lies, and cheats, just like any other. But we have restored Jewish pride. It's worth it."<sup>43</sup>

Richler draws his essay to a close with a feeling of concern and guilt towards the Arabs. Their towns are mentioned in the Old Testament. The land belongs to the Arabs too. The arguments of Israelis, who sought Israel as a refuge from prejudice and hatred, have a distressingly familiar ring:

"The trouble with the Arabs is they won't mix. They're private. They stick to their own people and areas. Another thing, you know, is they have loyalties outside the country."<sup>44</sup>

The irony becomes comic as Richler visits a souvenir shop in Nazareth:

The enterprising Arab proprietor, however, also sold little bags of earth; half of them labelled, "Earth from the Holy Land, Nazareth," the printing superimposed over a cross; the others reading "Earth from the Holy Land, Israel," a blue Star of David fixed above. I laughed. The Arab laughed. And it was with this shrewd irreverent Arab that the land of Israel came full circle for me. This Arab's gift for survival and self-evident humour seemed profoundly Jewish to me, more Jewish than the sabra. I could identify with him.<sup>45</sup>

Richler identification with the man from the ghetto comes as a reflex. He knows this man; he has something

in common with an inhabitant of a ghetto. That quality of being "off-center" from the main cultural push is that quality which lends ghetto-dwellers ironic distance, which in turn leads to laughter, and deflates all urges except the spontaneous desire to be alive, even in the most muddled joke of a life.

Richler has one more argument, with a lawyer in Jerusalem, when he challenges him on the subject of the Palestinians:

"But, surely," I said, "if the Jews are entitled to come 'home' after two thousand years then the son of an Arab refugee is a Palestinian too?"

"All right. Conditions in their camps are deplorable. However, the conditions I lived under in Dachau were worse."<sup>46</sup>

So the old suspicion, founded in The Acrobats, confirmed in A Choice of Enemies, satirized in Cocksure, is proved again: the arguments of men are not based on questions of principle, but, more concretely, on matters of power. And this is true of nations too; however one might argue that Israel has been driven to its position. But this predominance of the matter of power, or more fashionably, of territory, cruelly impinges on the shape of men's lives. The territorial imperative has a natural critic, the man with more provisional and



ambivalent loyalties:

. . . the Jew - or some Jews, at least -  
may have an exemplary role. To show that  
whereas trees have roots, men have legs  
and are each other's guests.<sup>47</sup>

So Richler chooses to stay outside the sanctuaries of  
territory, where shared folly and mutual hostility rule.  
Instead, he occupies those areas between the territories,  
slightly off-center, where the cold winds of irony are,  
and warns his readers to huddle together, if not for  
sympathy, for warmth.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Mordecai Richler, Hunting Tigers Under Glass, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Hunting Tigers, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Mordecai Richler, "The Undertain World," Canadian Literature, No. 41 (Summer, 1969), pp. 26-7.

<sup>7</sup> Hunting Tigers, p. 104.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> Nathan Cohen, "Heroes of the Richler View," Tamarack Review, No. 6 (1957), p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Hunting Tigers, p. 53.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>17</sup> Mordecai Richler, "My Year in Canada," Weekend Magazine, 27 September 1969, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Hunting Tigers, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Mordecai Richler, "Let Canada Despoil Her Own Resources!", Saturday Night, No. 85 (May, 1970), p. 52.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>22</sup> Hunting Tigers, p. 117.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 118-9.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>28</sup> George Steiner, Language and Silence, (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 143.

<sup>29</sup> Hunting Tigers, p. 133.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>32</sup> George Steiner, Language and Silence, p. 143.

<sup>33</sup> Hunting Tigers, p. 139.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 143-4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>41</sup>Mordecai Richler, St. Urbain's Horseman, p. 385.

<sup>42</sup>George Steiner, Language and Silence, p. 152.

<sup>43</sup>Hunting Tigers, p. 148.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>47</sup>Language and Silence, p. 152.

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APPENDIX

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