

KLEIN AND RICHLER: THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY

THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY THEME  
IN THE WORKS OF  
A. M. KLEIN AND MORDECAI RICHLER

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## INTRODUCTION

Abraham Moses Klein and Mordecai Richler are both Canadian writers brought up in the Jewish community of Montreal. Yet in spite of their similar backgrounds, and the fact that they are separated by little more than two decades, Klein and Richler demonstrate extremely different attitudes towards their cultural traditions and the Jewish community. Klein, throughout his work, exhibits the awareness that he is the inheritor of a noble religious and historical tradition. Richler, in spite of the fact that he, like Klein, was at one time destined for the rabbinate, adopts a distinctly less reverential attitude towards his heritage. He delights in satirising the Jews and their preoccupations, approaching at times perilously close to denouncing the traditions and the community which Klein praises.

The Jewish community is treated in Klein's work as a tightly knit group, united by its common beliefs and religious traditions. In the long early poem "Of Kings and Beggars", and in the series of poetic sketches "Portraits of a Minyan", Klein celebrates the shared heritage of the Jews of Eastern Europe, which unites the various individuals into a distinctive Jewish community. In bleaker poems the ghetto is transformed into an oppressed minority group.

preyed upon by the Gentiles. Generally, however, the Jewish community and the ghetto are described in terms which imply that it is a collection of the Chosen People, watched over by a benevolent deity.

Richler, however, instead of praising the Jewish community, depicts it as an oppressive cage which one is virtually obliged to flee. This is partly explained by the consideration that he and Klein are a generation apart in their attitudes towards the Jewish community. Klein's father emigrated to Canada at approximately the same time as Richler's grandfather, thus Richler is describing the ghetto in the New World, while Klein's vision of the community is informed by the Old World mentality. Where Klein, for example, writes of an enslaved Israel and of the sufferings of the Jews, the protagonist of Richler's first novel about Jewish life is repelled by his grandfather's similar vision of the embattled Jews. Noah Adler considers his grandfather Melech a "coward" because he "allowed the Goyim to define him".<sup>1</sup> In Richler's view, a code based on opposition is, in effect, a negative system of values, and, therefore, no system at all.

In his novels about Jewish life Richler also suggests that the ghetto, with its clearly defined system of

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<sup>1</sup> Mordecai Richler, Son of a Smaller Hero. (4th ed.; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p. 191.

values, is anachronistic as well. In the early novels not dealing with Jewish themes, the protagonists attempt to define themselves in a decaying, postwar world. André Bennett of The Acrobats and Norman Price of A Choice of Enemies struggle to establish a personal set of values in a world where the old systems are no longer tenable. The novels which describe Jewish life are informed with a similar awareness of the lack of an absolute moral code, a positive tradition, and a sense of community. Thus Richler's Jewish protagonists are usually depicted as rebel-heroes, solitary men in search of meaning and identity, aliens caught between the Jewish and the gentile worlds.

As well as these differences in attitude towards the Jewish community and tradition, Klein and Richler disagree on the possibility of assimilation of the Jews by the gentile culture. A. M. Klein is not concerned with the problems of reconciling the lifestyle of the Jews with the alien environment of America. The sense of tradition provides him with the consciousness of continuity and purpose, as well as strengthening his confident belief that Jewish culture will survive in spite of the dangers of assimilation. Thus, the problem of assimilation is quickly dismissed by Klein in a passage from The Second Scroll which describes Israel's nationalistic poets who predict that Jews abroad will quickly lose their identity:

And again and again they slipped into their



secondary theme -- shlilath hagaluth -- the negation of the Diaspora -- a conviction that Jewry abroad was doomed, whether by the uxorious embrace of assimilation or the fierce hug of anti-Semitism, doomed to disappear, if not immediately, eventually; ultimate perdition was but a matter of time.<sup>2</sup>

The autobiographical narrator of The Second Scroll dismisses such pessimistic declarations as "reactionary", claiming that poetry of this type is uncharacteristic of the Jews: "It did not belong to the essential thoughtways of our people. . .it surged up only as an answer to contemporary history. It was Israel's retort to Europe, couched in Europe's language."<sup>3</sup>

Richler, on the other hand, is not as optimistic about the Jews' ability to preserve their identity in an alien environment. One of the themes of his novels about Jewish life is the process of assimilation. For example, Jake Hersh, the protagonist of Richler's latest novel, St. Urbain's Horseman, observes, wondering at the gulf between his son's world and that of his grandfather, "In three generations, from foxy Jews to fox-hunting ones."<sup>4</sup> The crumbling of the culture of the ghetto, the efforts of its sons to escape it, and the vainer attempts of the older Jews

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<sup>2</sup>  
A. M. Klein, The Second Scroll, (3rd ed.; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p. 79.

<sup>3</sup>  
Ibid... p. 80.

<sup>4</sup>  
Mordecai Richler, St. Urbain's Horseman, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), p. 12.

to preserve it, are also themes that concern Richler.

However, lest this study of Klein and Richler take on the appearance of an analysis of two authors "yoked by violence together", to borrow Dr. Johnson's phrase, a word of explanation about its scope and purpose. The study is basically an analysis of two contrasting sensibilities. A. M. Klein's traditional Jewish vision will be compared to Mordecai Richler's ironic sensibility. Because the two authors differ in more than their attitudes towards the Jewish community and heritage, an analysis of what might be termed their respective world-views will be attempted. Critics who have discussed Klein's and Richler's works, incidentally, will be mentioned in the body of the thesis.

A. M. Klein has written four collections of poetry and a novel, as well as numerous poems published in such periodicals as The Canadian Forum, New Frontier, and The Canadian Jewish Chronicle. For the purposes of this thesis, only the collected poems and the novel will be discussed, not only because these volumes provide ample material for analysis, but because Klein's publication of only certain of his poems in volume form implies a significant distinction between the collected poems and those he dismissed.

In his early collections of poetry, Klein is preoccupied with Jewish themes -- life in the ghettos of Eastern Europe, hope for a restored Israel, the relation of the Chosen People to God. Yet Klein, in spite of his distinctly

traditional Jewish nature, expresses both joy and despair in his heritage. Hath Not A Jew, for example, alternates in tone between joyful affirmation of the Jewish identity, to despair at the horrors perpetrated upon the Jews. A similar polarity of tone is apparent in Poems as well.

The Hitleriad and The Rocking Chair and Other Poems were written at a stage of Klein's development when he had progressed beyond the almost clannish preoccupation with Jewish concerns exhibited in his first two volumes. These two works demonstrate an expansion of Klein's vision beyond the restrictions of the Jewish world. In The Rocking Chair, for example, Klein almost entirely avoids Jewish themes to concentrate on the land in which he was raised.

In The Second Scroll Klein exhibits a paradoxical union of all these aspects of his vision: the joy and despair of a poet aware of his Jewish identity are complemented by the awareness of a Canadian, as well as a Jewish, heritage. This multifaceted vision will be discussed in Chapter I, which will trace the stages of Klein's development to his attainment of a unified vision.

Chapter II will be devoted to a study of Mordecai Richler's vision. Richler has written three novels whose protagonists are Jewish. Son of a Smaller Hero describes Noah Adler's rebellious attempts to free himself from the Jewish family ruled over by his grandfather. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, as if to illustrate the harmful

effects of remaining within the ghetto, traces the development of a young man who chooses to remain within the Jewish community. St. Urbain's Horseman deals with a modern Jew's efforts to come to terms both with the ghetto he has left, and with the new world he has entered. Discussion will be based on these three novels because they are basically concerned with the theme of Jewish identity. However, references will be made to Richler's other works, to The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure, where Richler satirically treats the question of a Jewish identity, and to "This Year in Jerusalem", from the collection of essays Hunting Tigers Under Glass, which provides good background for a reading of St. Urbain's Horseman.

Chapter III will be a comparison of The Second Scroll and St. Urbain's Horseman. Not only are the two novels significant, for they might be considered as the two authors' final statements on the question of Jewish identity, but the two works lend themselves readily to comparison as well. The protagonist of The Second Scroll resembles Jake Hersh of St. Urbain's Horseman in his search for a long-lost relative. However, the contrasting use of the quest motif by the two authors demonstrates their differing visions of the Jewish community and identity.

## CHAPTER I

1

The twinship of my thought

A. M. Klein's first collection of poems, Hath Not A Jew, is infused with the spirit of Jewish tradition and legend. Klein writes of Jewish experience and myth not as an impartial observer, but as the inheritor of a religious and historical heritage. He expresses the awareness of this legacy in a poem from a later collection, "Psalm XXXVI, a Psalm touching genealogy":

Not sole was I born, but entire genesis:  
For to the fathers that begat me, this  
Body is residence. Corpuscular,  
They dwell in my veins, they eavesdrop at my ear,  
They circle, as with Torahs, round my skull,  
In exit and in entrance all day pull  
The latches of my heart, descend, and rise.<sup>2</sup>  
And there look generations through my eyes.

Thus, although he writes in English, and exhibits the influence of English poets, Klein proclaims that his "noble lineage" and "proud ancestry"<sup>3</sup> are Jewish. As M. W. Steinberg has pointed out in his essay on the influence of Jewish tradition on Klein's work, "He is always conscious of himself,

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A. M. Klein, The Rocking Chair and Other Poems. (3rd ed.; Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1966), p.7.

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A. M. Klein, Poems (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1944), p.46.

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A. M. Klein, Hath Not A Jew, (New York: Behrman's Jewish Book House, 1940), p.77.

as the furthest extension and summation of his people and its heritage."<sup>4</sup>

Hath Not A Jew is noteworthy because the themes that preoccupy Klein in this collection -- Jewish identity, religion and myth, the relation of the Chosen People to God -- are concerns that run through virtually all of his work. The American Jewish novelist Ludwig Lewisohn has remarked in the Foreword to Hath Not A Jew that "Klein had the luck, of course, to be born into a family and into an environment in which the lore and tradition of our people were things so alive that the quiver of this aliveness, so tense that it can humorously turn upon itself, has accompanied all his years."<sup>5</sup> Certainly the influence of Jewish "lore and tradition" is evident throughout the collection, as it is in Klein's later work, but the "quiver of this aliveness" turns upon itself in Klein's vision not only humorously, as Lewisohn suggests, but in despair and doubt as well. While Klein has protested<sup>6</sup> "Who rallies nightmares when he could have dreams?" his vision is broad enough to span the poles of both joy and despair in his Jewish heritage. However, though the mood of

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<sup>4</sup> M. W. Steinberg, "Poet of a Living Past: Tradition in Klein's Poetry", in Tom Marshall, ed., Critical Views on Canadian Writers: A. M. Klein (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970), p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Lewisohn, "Foreword to Hath Not A Jew", pp. vii-viii.

<sup>6</sup> A. M. Klein, The Hitleriad. (New York: New Directions, 1944), p. 5.

the poems contained in Hath Not A Jew alternates between hope and doubt, joy and despair, there remains throughout Klein's conviction that he is one of a community with a definite religious and historical heritage.

Klein's belief that he is a member of a specifically Jewish community is evident in "Greeting on This Day". His loyalties are drawn to the land of his fathers, causing him to consider the land of "northern snows" as a place of exile. However, he states that in spite of the alien environment in which he finds himself, the memory of Israel is constantly with him:

O Safed, Safed,  
Though never have I left my northern snows,  
Nor ever boarded ship for Palestine,  
Your memory anoints by [sic] brain a shrine,  
Your white roofs poetize my prose,  
Your halidom is mine.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, in "Sonnet in Time of Affliction", he bewails the necessity of using violence to free Israel from its usurpers, while regretting his inability to take part in the struggle:

Ah, woe, to us, that we, the sons of peace,  
Must turn our sharpened scythes to scimitars,  
Must lift the hammer of the Maccabees,  
Blood soak the land, make mockery of stars. . .  
And woe to me, who am not one of these, 8  
Who languish here beneath these northern stars. . .

Thus, although Klein sees himself as languishing beneath the stars in a strange country, he remains unwilling

<sup>7</sup>  
Hath Not A Jew, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup>  
Ibid., p. 29.

to forget his heritage, to be assimilated by the culture and customs of an alien civilization. This sense of the necessity of preserving one's traditions is perhaps best conveyed in "Sonnets Semitic". The sonnets, which range in tone from mildly self-deprecating irony to proud identification with the Jews, stress the importance of a tradition which both separates and defines. "Sonnet IV", for example, with its catalogue of heirlooms, implies the timelessness of tradition:

I shall not bear much burden when I cross  
My father's threshold to our common door;  
Only some odds I would not count as loss,  
Only some ends old days can not ignore:  
The prayer-shawl my mother cast upon  
My shoulders, blessing Israel with a man;  
Phylacteries my father gave his son;  
The bible over which my young eyes ran;  
And Talmud huge, once shield from heathen stones.  
I bring these as mementos; also, verse  
Scribbled in rhymes that memory condones,  
And a capacious though still empty purse.  
For your old age I keep a psalter-book  
From which to read on Sabbaths, in perruque.<sup>9</sup>

A number of the poems in Hath Not A Jew are dedicated to Klein's son. The fond father imagines the child growing up to be a model of orthodoxy, shunning the trivial pastimes of youth to study the Scriptures: "A little zaddik! men will say,/ Seeing my little boy at play."<sup>10</sup> This hope again implies a continuation of tradition, for Klein envisions his son as a guarantee of his father's, as well as the preceding

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<sup>9</sup>  
Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>10</sup>  
Ibid., p. 73.



generations', immortality:

Yea, singing the sweet liturgy,  
 . . . . .  
 Remembering me, even me,  
 In the breath of his word,<sup>11</sup>  
 In the sight of the Lord.<sup>11</sup>

While the preceding two poems emphasize the necessity of preserving tradition within the Jewish community and family, in "Sonnet V" Klein considers the dangers of encroachment by the gentile world. The poem humorously dismisses the possibility of being assimilated by the Gentiles, implying that even if the Jews attempt to forget their identity, the rest of the world is only too willing to remind them of it:

Now we will suffer loss of memory;  
 We will forget the tongue our mothers knew;  
 We will munch ham, and guzzle milk thereto,  
 And this on hallowed fast-days, purposely. . .  
 Abe will elude his base-nativity.  
 The kike will be a phantom; we will rue  
 Our bearded ancestry, my nasal cue,  
 And like the Gentiles we will strive to be.  
 Our recompense -- emancipation-day.  
 We will have friend where once we had a foe.  
 Impugning epithets will glance astray.  
 To gentile parties we will proudly go;  
 And Christians, anecdoting us, will say:                   12  
 "Mr. and Mrs. Klein -- the Jews, you know. . . "

Klein, however, does not deal solely with the Jews of the New World in this first collection of poems. Other poems depict characters from Eastern European ghettos and figures from Hebrew legend. While most of these poems are

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<sup>11</sup>

Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>12</sup>

Ibid., pp. 70-71.

light-hearted, Klein is not incapable of describing the more unpleasant aspects of the Jewish legacy. It is in poems such as "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" and "Design for a Medieval Tapestry" that Klein manifests the "nightmare" side of his vision. The Jewish ghetto in these poems takes on the appearance, not of a somewhat select, divinely favored community, but of a besieged and oppressed minority in a hostile world. Thus, in "Design for a Medieval Tapestry", Reb Zadoc, remembering how the Jews were maltreated by the Christians during the Middle Ages, lists the crimes perpetrated upon the Hebrews, while in "Job reviles", a poem of the same group, an indignant Jew questions an uncaring God:

How long, O Lord, will Israel's heart be riven?  
 How long will we cry to a dotard God  
 To let us keep the breath that He has given?  
 How long will you sit on your throne, and nod?<sup>13</sup>

The Jews' heritage of suffering, the exiles' function as the world's scapegoats, causes Klein to question a seemingly indifferent God. In spite of his warning against blasphemy -- "Lest you go shaking fists at passive skies,<sup>14</sup>/  
 And mouthing blasphemies in your distress,<sup>14</sup>/ Be silent." -- the poet is plagued by the unanswerable question, "Wherefore,<sup>15</sup>  
 Lord, and why?" Apparently Klein's doubts about divine justice have caused Miriam Waddington to take a rather mis-

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<sup>13</sup>

Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>14</sup>

Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>15</sup>

Ibid., p. 51.

taken view of these poems. In her analysis of Klein's work, she writes, "Although Klein was thoroughly imbued with Jewish tradition and folklore, and full of love for the Jews, he was never religious in the orthodox sense, and this is precisely the conflict which lies at the root of so much of his poetry."<sup>16</sup>

At the risk of unnecessarily arguing a rather fine point, it seems misleading to claim of the poems in Hath Not A Jew that they attack religious tradition, to state that "Whatever these poems are, they [are] not religious."<sup>17</sup> Questioning God's justice is not quite the same as denying his existence, and Klein, in spite of the doubts that plagued him during his literary career, remained religious throughout.

Waddington, however, argues the contrary, citing such examples of Klein's doubt as the poet's self-description in "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage": "a pauper in spirit, a beggar in piety,/ Cut off without a penny's worth of faith."<sup>18</sup> She also points out the disrespectful treatment accorded the orthodox Jews in "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens", and Klein's speculations that it is not a benevolent God, but a monstrous golem that rules the world:

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<sup>16</sup> Miriam Waddington, Studies in Canadian Literature: A. M. Klein. (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1970), p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Hath Not A Jew, p. 11.

Is it the finger of the Lord's right hand?  
Or is the golem saviour, this rude goth<sup>19</sup>  
Whose earthy paw is like a magic wand?

Nevertheless, Waddington seems to ignore the admiration and the praise Klein expresses for the faithful in poems such as "Reb Abraham" or "Dance Chassidic":

Thus let the soul be cast from pride, gesticulating  
Into humility, and from humility  
Into the pride divine, so alternating  
Until pride and humility be one,  
Until above the Jews, above the Scroll, above the  
Cherubim,<sup>20</sup>

There broods the Immanence of Him. . .

Thus, it seems too hasty a judgement to consider Klein to be lacking in respect for his religious tradition in this first collection of poems, for the poems that deal with religious doubt and the blasphemous questionings of God are counterbalanced by poems which express faith and hope. For instance, the void which confronts the questioning Reb Levi Yitschok, "Sitting on God's knees in the synagogue,/ Un-<sup>21</sup> answered even when the sunrise smiled", is occupied in a more cheerful poem by a God who "in His heaven hums,/ Twiddling His contented thumbs."<sup>22</sup>

However, instead of placing undue emphasis on only certain poems in an attempt to argue whether Klein's outlook

<sup>19</sup>

Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>20</sup>

Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>21</sup>

Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>22</sup>

Ibid., p. 101.

is basically religious or blasphemous, it would seem best to describe the alternating stages of belief and doubt in Klein's work as a "passionate debate with the Deity",<sup>23</sup> to use Irving Layton's phrase. M. W. Steinberg appears to have made the most perceptive comment on Klein's religious nature as it is expressed in his poetry:

The outcome of these struggles in Klein's poems is usually a re-affirmation of faith. In fact, usually the struggle is not with one's own spiritual inadequacy or doubts, but rather one that takes place within the framework of belief, of over-all acceptance, and it involves the need to reconcile evident injustice and suffering with faith in God's justice and mercy. The tension in these poems develops out of this attempt.<sup>24</sup>

Klein himself suggests that his spiritual struggles occur within a "framework of belief" in a later poem addressed to an "incognito god, anonymous lord":

I have no title for your glorious throne,  
and for your presence not a golden word,--  
only that wanting you, by that alone  
I do evoke you, knowing I am heard.<sup>25</sup>

If Klein's Hath Not A Jew alternates in mood between hope and despair, joy and doubt, the next collection, Poems, is almost unrelievedly pessimistic. In an age when man has descended to the level of beasts and Israel remains oppressed, the poet's vision is characterized by images of the apocalypse. The dark days transform the innocent into a

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Irving Layton, "Review of Poems", in Tom Marshall, ed., Critical Views on Canadian Writers: A. M. Klein (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970), p. 23.

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Steinberg, p. 106.

25

Poems, p. 30.

doubting, aged man confronted with issues that are not as easily resolved as they were in one's youth. "Psalm XXXIV", for example, dedicated to a former teacher, describes a painful journey from innocence. The "doubt-divided"<sup>26</sup> narrator despairs in the "terrible tumultuous night",

When roars the metal beast, the steel bird screams,  
And images of God, for fraud or fright,  
Cannot discern what is from that which seems.<sup>27</sup>

The Poems provide a good background for a reading of The Second Scroll, for Klein's joy at the reconstruction of the state of Israel becomes more easily understandable when it is considered in relation to the despair he felt during his country's captivity. If The Second Scroll is a manifestation of the elation felt at the establishment of the state, Poems reflects the despair evoked by the darkness before the light. "Psalm I" describes an Israel in captivity, foreshadowing as well Melech Davidson's question "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?"<sup>28</sup> :

Since prophecy has vanished out of Israel,  
And since the open vision is no more,  
. . . . .  
Where in these dubious days shall I take counsel?  
Who is there to resolve the dark, the doubt?  
. . . . .  
There is noise only in the groves of Baal.

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Ibid., p. 43.

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Ibid., p. 42.

28

The Second Scroll, p. 22.

Only the painted heathen dance and sing,  
 With frenzied clamouring.  
 Among the holy ones, however, is no sound at all.<sup>29</sup>

Faced with the "dark, the doubt", it becomes only natural for the poet to question divine justice. God is envisioned at times as uncaring, heedless, destroying the world instead of correcting its wrongs. In "Psalm VI" God, after viewing the "unspeakable horde"<sup>30</sup> of war-victims, resorts to further destruction rather than alleviating the sufferings of the unjustly persecuted:

The angel who wept looked into the eyes of God.  
 The angel who sang ceased pointing to the earth.  
 A little cherub who'd spied the earthly sod  
 Went mad, and flapped his wings in crazy mirth.  
 And the good Lord said nothing, but with a nod  
 Summoned the angels of Sodom down to earth.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, although Klein addresses a number of prayers to God in Poems, there remains the frightful consideration that the world is ruled not by a just and beneficent deity, but by "golems stalking in nightmare".<sup>32</sup> Tom Marshall has suggested that in Klein's poems of the middle and late thirties which imply "that if there is a God man has no meaningful contact with him. . . The figure that dominates

<sup>29</sup> Poems, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Hath Not A Jew, p. 40.

this poetry is the golem or mechanical man."<sup>33</sup> This demonic image is apparent in Poems as well. In "Ballad of the Days of the Messiah" God is ironically described as the Jugger-naut, "Messiah coming in his tank".<sup>34</sup> The poem which contains the most effective use of this image, however, is "Psalm XXIII, a psalm of justice, and its scales". The universe seems completely controlled by irrational, mechanistic forces, and the poet, driven to hopeless fury by what appears to be the arbitrary workings of Providence, imagines a rebellious uprising against divine decree:

I shall break in and enter heaven, and,  
 Remembering who, below, held upper hand,  
 And who was trodden into misery,--  
 I shall seek out the abominable scales  
 On which the heavenly justice is mis-weighed.  
 . . . . .  
 And leave those scales so gloriously broken,<sup>35</sup>  
 That ever thereafter justice shall be done.<sup>35</sup>

Yet Klein, in spite of his religious doubts, does not reject God. "The Psalter of Avram Haktani" contains, as well as the aforementioned poems of doubt and despair, psalms which reveal a deep faith. Avram Haktani, who, as Waddington suggests, is really Klein himself, since "Avram Haktani" is "an interlingual pun on the poet's name",<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Tom Marshall, "Theorems Made Flesh: Klein's Poetic Universe", in Tom Marshall, ed., Critical Views on Canadian Writers: A. M. Klein (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970), p. 157.

<sup>34</sup> Poems, p. 62.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> Waddington, p. 63.



professes his belief in "The undebatable verity,/ The truth  
unsoiled by epigram,/ The simple I am that I am."<sup>37</sup> As well  
as making this personal statement of faith, Klein demon-  
strates the belief that God looks over the Chosen People. In  
"Psalm XXVI. . . a Psalm of Israel, to bring to remembrance",  
which deals with the Jewish heritage of suffering and exile,  
the poet describes how the rivers of Babylon, the Nile, the  
Tiber, the Vistula and the Rhine flow with the blood and  
tears of the Hebrews. The poem ends with a powerful prayer  
for vengeance, implying that Klein, in spite of his doubts,  
retains the conviction that God does indeed watch over the  
Jews:

Gather them up, O Lord, these many rivers,  
And dry them in the furnace of Thy wrath!  
Let them not be remembered! Let them be  
So many soon-to-be forgotten clouds  
Dropping their rain  
Upon the waters of Thy favorite Jordan!<sup>38</sup>

Incidentally, this concept of an Israel watched over by God  
is important to an understanding of The Second Scroll.

Klein's next poetic work, The Hitleriad, marks a  
stage in his development during which his vision moves beyond  
the Jewish characters, traditions, and themes that preoccupied  
him in Hath Not A Jew and Poems. The satirical treatment of  
Hitler and the Nazi regime is written by a poet who denounces  
the injustices of the age not solely because of the violence

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<sup>37</sup>

Poems, p. 34

<sup>38</sup>

Ibid., p. 32.

perpetrated upon his own people, but because Hitler's transgressions are an affront to humanity. Klein wrote The Hitleriad not as an outraged Jew, but as an irate poet, addressing himself, as Waddington suggests, "to a larger world than [his] Jewish one".<sup>39</sup>

This is not meant to imply, however, that Klein entirely ignores the themes that concerned him in his earlier work. In fact, he claims that the shift from the subjects he had previously treated to the satirical attack on Hitler is rather distasteful, a fall "from grace to sin":

Happier would I be with other themes--  
 (Who rallies nightmares when he could have dreams?)  
 With other themes, and subjects more august--  
 Adolf I sing but only since I must.<sup>40</sup>

Describing himself in the invocation to the Muse as a dreamy recluse in an ivory tower where he plays "the solitaire of rhyme and wit",<sup>41</sup> he rallies perforce to the task at hand:

I am the grandson of the prophets! I  
 Shall not seal lips against iniquity.  
 Let anger take me in its grasp; let hate,  
 Hatred of evil prompt me, and dictate!<sup>42</sup>

This admission of his Jewish identity is the sole indication of Klein's background contained in the poem. Apparently he deliberately attempts to minimize his Jewish background by describing himself as a dreamy romantic. This

<sup>39</sup> Waddington, p. 90.

<sup>40</sup> The Hitleriad, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid..

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

new self-characterization is rather startling, for in his earlier work Klein had been preoccupied with more than, as he claims, "the sweet words, / That praise the blossoming flowers".<sup>43</sup> The theme of anti-Semitism, for example, only too obvious in a treatment of Hitler, had concerned Klein in both his previous works. The victimized Jew, described in as early a poem as "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", reappears in The Hitleriad:

Add then, the insured craft with which he chose  
The chosen people for his choicest prose:  
Here was a scapegoat to his measure made,  
Big enough to inform his wild tirade  
And too small to return its foe his due:  
The strange ubiquitous Jew!<sup>44</sup>

The Hitleriad is also interesting because, unlike the previous two collections of poetry, it contains no suggestions of religious doubt or despair. Assuming a definite moral stance, Klein denounces Hitler as the anti-Christ, a foe to both God and Man:

Nor did he merely wage his war on Man.  
Against the Lord he raised his brazen brow,  
Blasphemed His name, His works, contemned His plan,  
Himself a god announced, and bade men bow  
Down to his image, and its feet of clay!<sup>45</sup>

This criticism of Hitler's transgressions against both God and Man anticipates the eloquent description of the genocide perpetrated upon the Jews as deicide in "Gloss Gimel" of

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<sup>43</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>

Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>45</sup>

Ibid., pp. 27-28.

The Second Scroll. The poem ends with an invocation to both God and Man to avenge the war's injustices. Waddington, rather misleadingly, implies that Klein puts his faith in mankind's intolerance of injustice rather than in God's wrath against his foes: "[Klein] ends his poem, not with a plea to God, as in so many of his earlier poems, but with an exhortation to man to avenge the dead and restore justice to the world."<sup>46</sup> This evaluation suggests that Klein is somewhat doubtful of Providence's efficacy, choosing instead to base his hopes on man's sense of righteousness. However, the stanza which precedes the exhortation to mankind demonstrates that Klein, as in his earlier poems, is, in effect, praying for vengeance:

But not with human arrogance come I  
 To plead our Maker's cause, and make His cause  
 The mighty measure of my feeble words.  
 Himself, in His good time, the Lord of Hosts,  
 The slowness of His anger moved at last,  
 And His longsuffering at last forespent  
 Will rise, will shine, will stretch forth His right  
 hand  
 And smite them down, the open impious mouth,  
 The tongue blaspheming, silenced, in the dust!<sup>47</sup>

The Rocking Chair and Other Poems, Klein's last collection of poems before The Second Scroll, appears at first sight virtually an anomaly in a literary career marked by a specifically Jewish sensibility. The collection contains

<sup>46</sup>

Waddington, p. 88.

<sup>47</sup>

The Hitleriad, pp. 28-29.

poems which deal with Canada; and Montreal and its inhabitants. Klein appears to have forgotten his earlier oppressive sense of exile expressed in "Sonnets Semitic": "These northern stars are scarabs in my eyes."<sup>48</sup> The scarabs have fallen from his eyes, and in The Rocking Chair Klein celebrates his second homeland, his "exile's verdure fresh".<sup>49</sup> Montreal, for example, is described in terms that suggest that Klein, like Richler after him, is finally willing to admit that he is a "Jewish writer from Canada":<sup>50</sup>

You are a part of me, O all your quarters--  
And of dire pauvreté and of richesse--  
To finished time my homage loyal claim;  
You are locale of infancy, milieu  
Vital of institutes that formed my fate;  
And you above the city, scintillant,  
Mount Royal, are my spirit's mother,  
Almative, poitrine! <sup>51</sup>

It is interesting to note that while Richler states that to be a Jewish-Canadian writer is "to emerge from the ghetto twice",<sup>52</sup> Klein remains content to live within the double enclosure, fortified by the richness of the resultant "twinship of. . .thought".<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Hath Not A Jew, p. 63.

<sup>49</sup> The Rocking Chair, p. 31.

<sup>50</sup> Mordecai Richler, Hunting Tigers Under Glass (2nd ed.; London: Panther Books Ltd., 1971), p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> The Rocking Chair, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> Hunting Tigers Under Glass, p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> The Rocking Chair, p. 7.

Yet The Rocking Chair, in spite of Klein's changed attitudes about Canada, is not as glaringly anomalous as it appears at first sight. A. J. M. Smith has suggested that Klein views Canada with a Jewish sensibility: "il a substitué au monde juif un autre monde, qui n'est pas sans analogies avec le premier. . . Dans l'entité patriarcale, traditionnelle, et ecclésiastique qu'est le Canada français, Klein a trouvé un univers que sa sensibilité juive lui permet de comprendre et d'aimer."<sup>54</sup> An example of the Jewish sensibility that Klein exhibits in this collection of poems would be the description of the Indian reservation at Caughnawaga, which he considers a symbol of the Indians' decline, as "a grassy ghetto, and no home."<sup>55</sup> Miriam Waddington, too, considers the collection a "new application of the Jewish tradition": "Klein's themes remain the same as in the earlier work, except that he now infuses them with two new elements: the first, his use of the Montreal environment and French-Canadian culture, and the second, his own heightened sense of Canadian nationality."<sup>56</sup>

Klein's sense of Canadian nationality is heightened, it is true, but the awareness of belonging to another

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<sup>54</sup> A. J. M. Smith, "Abraham Moses Klein", trans. Guy Sylvestre, in Tom Marshall, ed., Critical Views on Canadian Writers: A. M. Klein (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970), p. 37.

<sup>55</sup> The Rocking Chair, p. 12.

<sup>56</sup> Waddington, pp. 91-92.

tradition is still evident. This consciousness of being an alien is nowhere more subtly expressed than in the poem "For the Sisters of the Hotel Dieu". Where in his earlier poems Klein had denounced the Gentiles for their discriminations between Christian and Jew, in this poem the gulf between the two traditions lends an almost magical mystery to the nuns who cared for the Jewish child:

O biblical birds,  
 who fluttered to me in my childhood illnesses  
 --me little, afraid, ill, not of your race,--  
 the cool wing for my fever, the hovering solace,  
 the sense of angels--  
 be thanked, O plumage of paradise, be praised.<sup>57</sup>

However, in spite of the consciousness of not quite belonging to the gentile race, anti-Semitism is not as major a concern as it was in Klein's earlier work. Compared with an earlier poem like "Design for a Medieval Tapestry", with its indignant descriptions of the Jews oppressed by Christians, "Hormisdas Arcand" from The Rocking Chair seems almost uncharacteristically muted. The poem's tone is pitying rather than indignant, and the depiction of the anti-Semitic party leader stresses his pettiness rather than his prejudice. The "first blast" of his diatribe is made to sound pathetically single-minded:

It keeps repeating itself, like a youpin meal.  
Et, pour vrai dire, what more political  
 is there to say after you have said:  
A bas les maudits Juifs!<sup>58</sup>

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The Rocking Chair, p. 6.

<sup>58</sup>

Ibid., p. 46.

In this collection Klein anticipates one of the themes of The Second Scroll, the basic unity of the world's religions and races. The faith of the Gentiles, which he had previously criticized since it was used as a justification for anti-Semitism, is seen in "The Cripples" as a rebuke for his own religious doubts. Where in an earlier poem he had felt guilty because Jewish beggars and blindmen danced in spite of their afflictions, while he remained unable to "fathom how they danced,/ Or why",<sup>59</sup> in "The Cripples" it is the religious intensity of the Christians hobbling up the stairs to St. Joseph's Oratory that causes him anguish: "And I who in my own faith once had faith like this,/ but have not now,<sup>60</sup> am crippled more than they."

This is Klein's last expression of religious doubt before the publication of The Second Scroll. In a poem written during the bleak period when Israel was in captivity and the world at war, Klein had ironically proclaimed that "The days of the Messiah are at hand".<sup>61</sup> The Second Scroll, written in a spirit of affirmation, celebrates the fulfilment of the prophecy. An aged rabbi tells the narrator of the novel,<sup>62</sup> "We live in Messiah's days."

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Poems, p. 17.

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The Rocking Chair, p. 4.

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Poems, p. 61.

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The Second Scroll, p. 88.



The new state of Israel becomes the focus of the novel, for with its rebirth the nation symbolizes a divine sanctioning of the agonies of pogrom, exile, extermination camps and war. The new state symbolizes an affirmation of the Jewish identity. As the autobiographical narrator of The Second Scroll states, "Israel had not only returned back into Time; it still belonged to Eternity."<sup>63</sup>

Israel's attainment of independence inspires the narrator of The Second Scroll to express his loyalty to the land of his forefathers:

My life was, and is, bound to the country of my father's choice, to Canada; but this intelligence, issuing, as it did, from that quarter of the globe which had ever been to me the holiest of the map's bleeding stigmata, the Palestine whose geography was as intimately known as the lines of the palm of my hand, filled me with pride, with exaltation, with an afflatus odorous of the royal breath of Solomon. I was like one that dreamed. I, surely, had not been of the captivity; but when the Lord turned again <sup>64</sup> to the captivity of Zion, I was like one that dreamed.

The loyalty expressed for Israel suggests more than overly emotional nationalistic fervor. As M. W. Steinberg points out in his introduction to the novel, "contemporary Jewish history is interpreted in terms of religion as the coming together again of God, the Jewish people, and the Holy Land."<sup>65</sup> The joyful affirmation, the sense of fulfilment expressed

<sup>63</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>

Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>65</sup>

M. W. Steinberg, "Introduction to The Second Scroll", p. xv.

by Klein are easily understandable when one considers his preoccupation with Israel's captivity in Hath Not A Jew and Poems. With the establishment of the state of Israel, Klein's religious doubts are resolved, for the miracle of the reborn state was caused, in his opinion, by a God who had finally intervened in Jewish affairs: "the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion".

This religious interpretation of the events of Jewish history is stressed in a number of scenes in the novel. The narrator at one point disagrees with the views of a fellow-traveller during a flight to Israel. The latter's interpretation of the causes for the establishment of the state is based primarily on historical and sociological foundations. The narrator thus asks his companion, "And what role. . . does Providence play in your scheme?"<sup>66</sup> The narrator's belief in God's intervention in human affairs is hinted at in another scene as well. In Rome he objects to the blandishments of Settano's (Satan's) "materialist interpretation of history".<sup>67</sup>

The Second Scroll traces the quests of two individuals for meaning and identity. Melech Davidson moves from orthodoxy through doubt to a re-affirmation of his faith. His nephew from Canada, the narrator of the novel, follows

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<sup>66</sup>

The Second Scroll, p. 73.

<sup>67</sup>

Ibid., p. 46.

after him in his wanderings and in the process achieves a re-awakened understanding of his heritage. The quest is thus the major theme of the novel: Melech's search for identity and his nephew's interpretation of the quest are the novel's central concerns.

At the novel's beginning Melech is a Talmudic scholar, idolized by his nephew's parents, for his orthodoxy serves as an inspiration to them. Situated as they are in an alien environment, Melech, in effect, serves as an example to them, proving that the orthodox way of life is not obsolete, that the beliefs they feel threatened are still strong: "He represented a consoling contrast to the crass loutish life about us where piety was scorned as superstition, and learning reviled as hapless, and where Jews were not ashamed to wax rich selling pork."<sup>68</sup> Melech reminds his relatives in Montreal that they are a part of a noble heritage; he virtually becomes a symbol of tradition that helps them to maintain their faith when they are confronted by the shock of a seemingly baser lifestyle: "Surrounded by such uncouthness, it was good to have the recollection of the young Talmudist cherishing Torah in its integrity, continuing a tradition that went back through the ages to Sura and Pumbeditha and back farther still and farther to get lost in the zigzag and lightning of Sinai."<sup>69</sup> This type of mentality, this sense

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

of the necessity of preserving an endangered tradition, is evident in Klein's first collection of poems, Hath Not A Jew.

Melech's faith, however, receives a severe shock when he witnesses a pogrom in his town. The first suggestion of a "tone of bitterness"<sup>70</sup> towards his faith is contained in a letter that his relatives receive in the midst of the joy of Simchas Torah. The pogrom has effected his faith adversely, and, like the narrator of Klein's "Psalm XXIII", he wonders, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?"<sup>71</sup> The religious doubts caused by his ordeal lead eventually to his becoming a Bolshevik. The change alienates his relatives<sup>72</sup> in Montreal, for "Bolshevism meant the denial of the Name". Klein suggests the limitations of Melech's vision, as well as implying that his own earlier religious doubts were unfounded, by contrasting this despair with the joy of Simchas Torah. The feast symbolizes the "eternal circle",<sup>73</sup> rebirth as well as death. Melech, however, is preoccupied with death, and ignores the possibility of rejuvenation following the agony.

Melech's nephew does not follow his parents in dismissing his atheist relative. Not only is he less rigidly

<sup>70</sup>

Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>71</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>

Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>73</sup>

Ibid., p. 20.

orthodox than his parents, but he has already been caught up in the process of forming his own image of his uncle. Since he has never seen a photograph of Melech, whose orthodoxy forbade him to have his picture taken, he has formed his own image of the mysterious personage: "I had to content myself, aided by my mother's sketchy generalities, with imagining Uncle Melech's appearance. Throughout the decades that followed, this afforded me an interesting pastime, for as the years went by and I myself changed from year to year, the image of Uncle Melech that I illegally carried in my mind also suffered its transformations."<sup>74</sup> Thus, not possessing a single, fixed image of Melech, his nephew can easily adapt to the metamorphosis. Not having determined to view his uncle as a fixed symbol as his orthodox parents do, he can readily alter his vision to include a new manifestation.

However, Melech's flirtation with Bolshevism proves short-lived. Just before the narrator sets out for Israel to compile a collection of the new state's poetry, a letter arrives from his uncle who has reverted to the idiom of his orthodox days. Disenchanted with Bolshevism, and having escaped the horrors of war and the ordeal of another mass slaughter of his people at Kamenets, Melech feels a new sense of community with the Jews. Where he had previously questioned God's will, he now thanks him for the miracle:

Even now I do not know how it happened or by what merit it was I who was chosen, out of the thousands who perished, to escape all of the strange deaths that swallowed up a generation. At times I feel -- so bewildered and burdened is my gratitude -- that the numbered dead run through my veins their plasma, that I must live their unexpired six million circuits, and that my body must be the bed of each of their nightmares.<sup>75</sup>

The sense of kinship felt by Melech echoes that expressed by Klein in "Psalm XXXVI, a Psalm touching genealogy". As if to fully experience this feeling of kinship, Melech associates with various types of Jews, from the beggars of Casablanca to the proud inhabitants of the reborn state.

Klein, however, does not advocate Jewish militancy or nationalism in the novel. Although he rejoices at the establishment of the state of Israel, his vision has broadened beyond the sense of exclusiveness expressed in his early poetry. This expanded vision is apparent in Melech's letter, which his nephew receives in Rome from the Monsignor who attempted to convert the uncle to Christianity. The nephew's fears about his uncle's possible conversion are quickly allayed, for the letter contains an accusation of the Gentiles for the crimes committed against the Jews during the war: "Heinous crimes -- it is at the threshold of his non-Jewish contemporaries that he lays them, corpse upon accusing corpse."<sup>76</sup> However, accusation and bitterness are not the main themes of the letter: the main premise of the document

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<sup>75</sup>

Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>76</sup>

Ibid., p. 52.

is "the divinity of humanity".<sup>77</sup> Melech's letter states, "Since Adam is created in the image of God, the killing of man is deicide! Since Eve is a reproductive creature, the murder of the mortal is a murder of the immortal!"<sup>78</sup> The narrator of The Second Scroll also suggests, almost wistfully, the hope that mankind will eventually ignore the divisions that hamper the formation of a human community. Klein's preoccupation with the suffering of the Jews, and the resulting sense of an exclusive community, have been replaced by a broader vision. For example, in a reverie after his audience with the Monsignor, the narrator toys with the idea of Melech becoming a priest and swiftly rising in the Church hierarchy until he becomes Pope. With his accession to the papal throne, Melech would publish the encyclical that would result in universal harmony: "the abolition of all creeds, save Faith's supernal behest; the amalgamation of religions: Christianity, Judaism, Mohammedanism, a trinity made one."<sup>79</sup> A similar epiphanic moment of hope for the abolition of the differences that separate mankind occurs when the nephew hears a young Arab singing: "I recognized in that singing the accents of forgotten kinship and was through it transported back to ancient star-canopied desert campfires about which there sat, their faces firelit, my ancestors and that

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<sup>77</sup>

Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>78</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>

Ibid., p. 45.

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Arab's."

Finally, the nephew arrives in the land of his forefathers, hoping to find his uncle as well as to compile a representative collection of the new state's poetry. The optimism he feels on the flight to Israel is quickly dispelled by a sense of frustration at ever attaining the objects of his two-fold mission. The figure of Uncle Melech is as nebulous as the new state's poetry: "Uncle Melech, present yet evanescent, before me, yet beyond -- I have him and I have him not! My quest of the essence of contemporary Hebrew poetry was beset by similar difficulty."<sup>81</sup> Seeking the particular instead of grasping the whole with the complete vision hampers his search. Eventually, however, in a moment of epiphany, "the theme, the one melodic ascendancy"<sup>82</sup> he wishes to find is perceived, not among Israel's poets, but in the nation's streets. One evening, after a literary soirée, he is blessed with the vision of "the great efflorescent impersonality",<sup>83</sup> the signs and advertisements of Israel's merchants and shopkeepers:

They were not members of literary societies, the men who were giving new life to the antique speech, but merchants, tradesmen, day labourers. In their

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Ibid., p. 57.

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Ibid., p. 79.

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Ibid., p. 80.

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Ibid., p. 85.



daily activity, and without pose or flourish, they showed it to be alive again, the shaping Hebrew imagination. . . There were dozens, there were hundreds of instances of such metamorphosis and rejuvenation. Nameless authorship flourished in the streets.<sup>84</sup>

The religious nature of Klein's vision is apparent in the terms with which he describes this new poetry of the reborn state: "The fixed epithet wherewith I might designate Israel's poetry, the poetry of the recaptured time, was now evident. The password was heard everywhere -- the miracle! I had found the key image."<sup>85</sup>

The narrator's discovery of the key image -- the miracle -- is echoed in his realization of Melech's true significance. The uncle he had searched for is killed, but the sadness his nephew feels is soon dispelled. At the funeral, attended by multitudes of Jews, it is rebirth and affirmation -- the miracle -- rather than death and despair that are stressed. The emphasis is on hope and rebirth rather than on death: "he had through the sheer force of his existence again in our life naturalized the miracle. The company of men now he had left and was one with the soil of Israel, but here in Israel these were not really tombs but antechambers to new life, the mise-en-scène for an awakening."<sup>86</sup> It is at the funeral as well that Melech's symbolic function

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<sup>84</sup>

Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>85</sup>

Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>86</sup>

Ibid., p. 92.

as the personification of the Jewish people is finally realized by the narrator. As one of the speakers at the funeral describes Melech, "he had become a kind of mirror, an <sup>87</sup>aspekklaria, of the events of our time."

Melech's shifting roles during his quest for identity -- his orthodoxy, his atheism, his flirting with Christianity, his passive suffering as well as his militancy -- mirror the roles of the Jewish people before their return to the Promised Land, the reborn state of Israel. As Steinberg points out, "It is clear that Uncle Melech is to be taken as the Jew in exile, and his experiences, his divagations from the faith. . . are those of his people, as are his sufferings, the burden of the galuth, and his eternal quest for truth and justice, and his final ascendance to the Promised Land."<sup>88</sup> Of the nephew's quest he writes, "His journey and search for the Uncle be-<sup>89</sup> come a successful search for identification." But it is not enough to state that the narrator achieves "a sense of belonging, of kinship with all Jews."<sup>90</sup> Such a feeling of kinship is evident on the narrator's part throughout the novel, not only at the conclusion of his quest.

What seems to be the important result of the nephew's

<sup>87</sup>

Ibid.,

<sup>88</sup>

Introduction, p. x.

<sup>89</sup>

Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>90</sup>

Ibid.

quest is that he becomes capable of perceiving and articulating the significance of the wanderings of Uncle Melech, the symbol of the Jewish people. To borrow a phrase from Joyce, he forges in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race, mythologizing, in effect, the archetypal Jew. Interestingly enough, the role of the poet was previously discussed by Klein in "Yehuda Ha-Levi, his Pilgrimage", an allegory of the poet's relation to the state of Israel. The poem, written before the establishment of the state of Israel, compares Zion to a captive princess. The poet Halevi is murdered after his pilgrimage to the imprisoned heroine. However, the poem ends on an optimistic note, in spite of the poet's death and the princess' imprisonment:

Liveth the tale, nor ever shall it die!  
 The princess in her tower grows not old.  
 For that she heard his charmed minstrelsy,  
 She is forever young.  
 . . . . .  
 Halevi sang her song, and she is comforted!<sup>91</sup>

The poem's conclusion suggests the importance of the poet's function as the interpreter and preserver of tradition. In a similar manner, the narrator of The Second Scroll, a latter-day Halevi, immortalizes Melech, transforming him into the symbol of the Jewish people: "And in your death, in your ubiquity, / Bespeak them all, our sundered cindered kin".<sup>92</sup>

Miriam Waddington hints at this interpretation in

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<sup>91</sup>

Poems, p. 82.

<sup>92</sup>

The Second Scroll, p. 98.

her treatment of the novel. In her analysis of the quest theme she writes:

The narrator is to go to Israel to find and translate the authentic new poetry. The narrator, then, is an artist, in search of the truest art. But to complicate matters, the narrator adds to the first mission, a second one -- the search for his long lost Uncle Melech; and the search for Uncle Melech results in the retracing of the latter's footsteps, so that both quests finally merge and are contained in the single person of the narrator.<sup>93</sup>

Waddington, however, seems to see a distinction between the quest of the artist and the quest of the nephew for his uncle. The narrator, as she states, is an artist "in search of the truest art", and the quests do merge, but not merely in the manner she suggests -- Melech's and his nephew's quests being finally joined in the single person of the narrator. The quests merge on a slightly different level: the quest for Uncle Melech does not "complicate matters", but is eventually combined with the artist's search for the "truest art".

The Second Scroll might be termed a poet's quest for a unified vision. In fact, the nephew's search for "the key image" echoes the quest of another artist-figure in Canadian literature. Like the narrator of The Second Scroll, David Canaan, the protagonist of Ernest Buckler's The Mountain and the Valley, also struggles to attain "the single core of

meaning". Thus the narrator of The Second Scroll does not grieve for his uncle's death for he has assured his immortality by grasping and articulating the unified image which he has searched for since childhood: "I had looked and searched for my kinsmen, and now that I had found him -- I would not ever look upon his face. Forever would I have to bear in my mind my own conjured image of Uncle Melech."<sup>94</sup>

The Second Scroll also demonstrates a reconciliation of the opposites that plagued Klein throughout his literary career. Religious doubt caused by the enslavement of Israel and the oppression of the Jews has been resolved by "the miracle" of the establishment of the state. Klein's double heritage, Jewish and Canadian, has also been harmonised, for, as John Matthews has pointed out, "through Melech's martyrdom the narrator has finished his pilgrimage and is at peace. He can return to Canada with the knowledge that his people have assumed their inheritance. There is no longer a need for the masochism of minority self-assertion."<sup>95</sup>

Minority self-assertion, the mentality of the ghetto, is also a theme that concerns Mordecai Richler. Where Klein progresses from a preoccupation with life in the ghetto to a stage where his vision includes both his Canadian and Jewish heritages, Richler might be described as approaching

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The Second Scroll, p. 91.

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John Matthews, "Abraham Klein and the Problem of Synthesis", in Tom Marshall, ed., Critical Views on Canadian Writers: A. M. Klein (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970), p. 150.

the problem from the other extreme. His early novels about Jewish life criticize both Canada and the ghetto. His last novel, St. Urbain's Horseman, however, has as protagonist an expatriate who has finally reconciled himself to his double heritage. The development of this vision will be traced in Chapter II.

## CHAPTER II

"What do you think is the most valuable thing in the world today?"

"The Jewish tradition."

"Where will boozing get you? Nowhere." Herky plucked Jake's glass out of his hand. "I'm serious, for Chrissake."<sup>1</sup>

The illusory nature of the Jewish ghetto of Montreal, its paradoxical strength and weakness, are described in Son of a Smaller Hero : "The ghetto of Montreal has no real walls and no true dimensions. The walls are the habit of atavism and the dimensions are an illusion. But the ghetto exists all the same."<sup>2</sup> The restrictions of the ghetto are mirrored in the microcosm of the Adler family:

The Adlers lived in a cage and that cage, with all its faults, had justice and safety and a kind of felicity. A man knew where he stood. Melech ruled. The nature of the laws did not matter nearly as much as the fact that they had laws. The Jews, liberated and led into the desert by Moses, had wanted nothing so badly as to return to slavery in Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

Noah Adler, the novel's protagonist, rebels against the confinement of the ghetto and the code of his grandfather. The loss of his Jewish identity is dramatized in the description of a meeting he attends, during which a militant Jew

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<sup>1</sup> St. Urbain's Horseman, p. 392.

<sup>2</sup> Son of a Smaller Hero, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

addresses a local youth group. The speech does not arouse any feeling of community in Noah: "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."<sup>4</sup> The anguishes are ineffective not because they are merely conventional, but because Noah lacks the sense of community to make the feeling of outrage possible.

His credo at first is one of isolation, of denial of tradition. As he states, "I should have the right to begin with my birth."<sup>5</sup> He is, however, not exempt from an inherent desire for a community to which to belong. Before he commits the cardinal sin of having an affair with a shiksa, his position is summarized: "Noah had renounced a world with which he had at least been familiar and no new world had as yet replaced it. He was hungering for an anger or a community or a tradition to which he could relate his experience."<sup>6</sup> It is this undefined yearning that prompts his restless wanderings between the ghetto and the gentile world.

Noah also suffers from the awareness that his rebellion against his grandfather is merely anarchical; he is painfully conscious that, instead of fighting for a new cause, he is

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<sup>4</sup>

Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>5</sup>

Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>6</sup>

Ibid., p. 64.



merely rejecting an old system. Before his leavetaking, mere anger had seemed enough: "At home his indignation had nourished him. Being wretched, and in opposition, had organized his suffering. But that world, that world against which he had rebelled so vociferously, was no longer his."<sup>7</sup> Thus, Noah's awareness that "It's not enough to rebel. . . To destroy. It is necessary to say yes to something",<sup>8</sup> makes him more than a typically disenchanting refugee from the ghetto.

As if to emphasize this point, his rebellion is contrasted to those of Melech's youngest son and daughter. Both Ida and Shloime turn against Melech's rule, but, unlike Noah who is repelled by the ghetto's hypocrisy, they merely rebel against inconvenience. Petty sensualists, they defy Melech because he inhibits them. Shloime progresses from a pool-hall frequenter to a petty thief to a commie-hating soldier. As the end-product of Melech's system, he terrifies Noah: "Had Melech Adler abandoned love for the sake of righteousness and come to America to produce this dangerously small man?"<sup>9</sup> Ida's rebellion, too, is on no grander a scale. Concerned only with her movie magazines, the Top 40, and her gentile boyfriend, she nevertheless comes to the startling conclusion that Melech might not be as terrifying a

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

figure as she had supposed: "She began to suspect that there were many more pleasures and many fewer punishments than those catalogued in the law according to Melech Adler."<sup>10</sup>

Ida's surreptitious romance with her gentile boyfriend is a contrast to Noah's affair with Miriam, the wife of his professor. Where Ida's passion seems fired mainly by the consideration that the match will be frowned upon by the rest of the family, Noah does not depend upon his relatives' disapproval as a stimulant.

It is among the Gentiles, too, that Noah forms the beginnings of a positive morality. When the affair is discovered by Miriam's husband, Noah realizes that Theo, in spite of his indignation, is offering him the chance to continue a clandestine affair with his wife as long as she agrees to stay with him, instead of leaving with Noah. This realization provides Noah with the healthy awareness that the world of the Gentiles is not as magical as one might suppose, that its concern with proper appearances makes it similar to the society he has left: "Surely this society has as little veracity, if more novelty, than the one that I have sprung from. Noah was exhilarated. He felt that he was no longer merely a rebel. An iconoclast. He was beginning to develop a morality of his own."<sup>11</sup>

Noah's affair with Miriam is significant because

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<sup>10</sup>

Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>11</sup>

Ibid., p. 106.

through their relationship he realizes that it is not enough merely to flee one type of ghetto for another. The world of the Gentiles, Noah learns, is not a magical haven, but as hollow and illusory as the ghetto he has renounced. The romance at first pleases Noah because its idyllic nature is in accord with his rather naive belief that there is no past, no tradition, that, in effect, the world revolves around him: "Noah felt freer than he ever had previously: there was no past and no future."<sup>12</sup> The affair, however, soon loses its magical overtones and is terminated when Noah discovers that its responsibilities make his and Miriam's relationship not unlike that between him and his mother Leah.

Leah depends on Noah as her ailing father had once sought comfort from her. Miriam, too, develops a cloying dependence on Noah. Thus, Noah's forsaking of Miriam is not so much a cowardly flight from responsibility as it is a realization of incompatibility, an awareness that he is in danger of reverting to the type of relationship that he had fled the ghetto to avoid. The affair also fails because Miriam has, in spite of her betrayal of Theo, modelled her life too closely on his to change with Noah. Noah represents a polar opposite to the ordered world of his grandfather, and to the not unsimilar, structured, sterile lifestyle of Theo Hall.

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<sup>12</sup>

Ibid., p. 114.

Reluctantly pulled back towards his family by the news of his father's death and his mother's illness, Noah attempts to re-enter the Jewish world. He makes the acquaintance of the Goldenbergs, who are modern Jews, but as enamoured of appearances as the Adlers and the Halls. Like Noah's grandfather who had once secretly loved a shiksa, the Goldenbergs "each. . . had a tiny deviation all his and/or her own. None conformed completely."<sup>13</sup> This last encounter with hypocrisy motivates Noah to flee for Europe. As George Woodcock states, "Each orthodoxy and each conformity survives only because its supporters have found the appropriate evasions that allow them to retain the illusion of individuality, but, while their evasions keep them human, they also make them culpable."<sup>14</sup>

Noah recognizes that his rebellion, as well as his attempt to reconcile himself to the Jewish community, have not really changed him. He still has "to say yes to something":

The people, the laws, that he had rebelled against had been replaced by other, less conspicuously false, laws and people while he had been away. The shifting of the ghetto sands seemed terribly unfair to him. If the standard man can be defined by his possessions, then rob his house and you steal his identity. Noah

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<sup>13</sup>

Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>14</sup>

George Woodcock, Mordecai Richler, "Canadian Writers Number 6" (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 27.

had supposed himself not to be a standard man. But his house had been robbed and his identity had been lost. He was shaken. Not only because he felt a need to redefine himself, but because he realized, at last, that all this time he had only been defining himself Against.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, hungering for "some knowledge of himself that was independent of others",<sup>16</sup> Noah decides to go to Europe. The voyage is not considered a final solution to his quest for identity, but merely another step in the search. G. David Sheps has suggested that this rebellious stance, this flight, not only on Noah's part, but of all of Richler's early protagonists, is "an act more of gesture than of coherent substance".<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the vagueness of the quest is partially explained by Richler's identification with Noah. As Hugo McPherson has pointed out, "the closing ambiguity of the novel appears inadvertent rather than deliberate" because Richler wrote Son of a Smaller Hero as a "chapter in fictional autobiography". The result is that the author remains "uncomfortably close to his hero's anger and confusion".<sup>18</sup> Interestingly enough, George Woodcock's description of

<sup>15</sup> Son of a Smaller Hero, p. 179.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>17</sup> G. David Sheps, "The Novels of Mordecai Richler: An Interpretation", in his Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Mordecai Richler (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1971), p. xxi.

<sup>18</sup> Hugo McPherson, "Fiction 1940-1960", in C. F. Klinck, ed., Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English (4th ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 714.

Mordecai Richler's flight from Montreal's Jewish community might be read out of context to describe Noah at the conclusion of the novel: "His departure from Montreal was an expression of his final decision to abandon, not his Jewish traditions, but the feeling that the Jew has a special position in the order of things that must be maintained and defended."<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, Noah admits his debt to tradition before leaving Montreal. Richler suggests that Noah has matured since his first rebellion, that he is not merely "sort of between things"<sup>20</sup> as he was when he first left home. Before his departure he tells his grandfather, "I am going and I'm not going. I can no more leave you, my mother, or my father's memory, than I can renounce myself."<sup>21</sup> This acknowledgement of his debt to the past implies that he has matured, that he has finally been able to "say yes to something".

Melech Adler remains in Montreal to wonder at his grandson's departure. His experience in the New World has caused him to consider Canada as decadent, somehow emasculating: "What for a men do they make in Canada? Sons they make, not fathers."<sup>22</sup> Contemptuous of his sons Shloime and Wolf, Noah's father, he is nevertheless afraid to acknowledge his respect

<sup>19</sup>

Woodcock, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup>Son of a Smaller Hero, p. 38.<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 203.<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

for Noah. He has sacrificed his life to the appearance of righteousness, and he finally retreats to the vain hope that his grandson will be divinely punished for his transgressions. His treatment is not without poignancy, however, for Richler portrays him as an old man willfully blinding himself to a changing way of life. The community he wishes to maintain is crumbling around him, his children are rebelling, while he ineffectually attempts to exercise control. Distrustful of the Gentiles, he seems to Noah "a coward [who] allowed the Goyim to define him."<sup>23</sup> His error is that he persists in seeing the enemy outside, threatening to overwhelm his little fortress, while in actuality its foundations are crumbling from within.

Melech changes from the stern patriarch at the novel's beginning to a shaken, desperate man by its conclusion. The extent of the change is made obvious in two similar descriptions of his vision of God. At the novel's beginning his faith was secure: "Each man creates God in his own image. Melech's God, who was stern, just, and without mercy, would reward him and punish the boy. Melech could count on that."<sup>24</sup> A similar description at the novel's conclusion evokes the almost hysterical insistence on belief to which he has been reduced: "Each man creates God in his own image. Melech's God, who was stern, sometimes just, and always without mercy,

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<sup>23</sup>

Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>24</sup>

Ibid., p. 40.

would reward him and punish the boy. Melech could count on that."<sup>25</sup>

Richler seems rather skeptical of religious faith in this novel. In a statement that echoes the post-war disillusionment of André Bennett of The Acrobats, Noah Adler states, "Nothing is absolute any longer. . . 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."<sup>26</sup>

The dangers of religious frenzy, for example, are dramatized in the scene which describes the funeral of Wolf Adler, who has been elevated to the stature of a saint by an overly-zealous congregation. The man who is supposed by the crowd to have died for the Torah rushed into the flames to rescue what he thought was a box full of money. In an attempt to enhance the irony of the situation, Richler rather clumsily compares the funeral to a previous display of religious fervor: "Outside, the crowd quietened. Identities were consumed one after the other until it became one taut, expectant face. Truly, this was the crowd that had waited at the foot of Sinai on the third day."<sup>27</sup>

Max Adler, Noah's rich uncle, has a lot to do with maintaining the illusion of Wolf's sainthood. Finding the

<sup>25</sup>  
Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>26</sup>  
Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>27</sup>  
Ibid., p. 146.



publicity favorable for his upcoming election campaign, he manipulates a credulous public into transforming a cowardly little man into a hero. The suggestion that money is power is contained in the implications that he has displaced Melech as the virtual head of the Adler family. His takeover also implies the end of the Old World mentality, symbolized by Melech. His assumption of control in the Adler family suggests as well that a more secular system of values has replaced the Old World codes. Miriam Waddington has pointed out that, "Since most European Jews were very poor, class distinctions, as we know them, were non-existent, and the measure of a man was his learning and knowledge of Torah."<sup>28</sup> The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, Richler's next novel about Jewish life, depicts the progress of a young man who whole-heartedly believes in the secular codes of the New World.

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz traces the development of a Jew who does not flee the ghetto, but stays within it, obeying the dictates and following the prejudices of its inhabitants. Noah Adler comments in Son of a Smaller Hero that "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>29</sup>  
 Duddy exhibits this sort of paradoxical dependence on the Gentiles in his business dealings. Although he is clannish almost to a fault, the business name he adopts is "Dudley Kane" while his imaginary brother is named "Bradley". The novel describes Duddy's love-hate relationship with the Gentiles, and its eventual outcome.

With the exception of a number of scenes that Richler seems to have included to demonstrate his talent for writing short stories, the novel is a bildungsroman, tracing Duddy's progress from childhood to manhood. Apparently the consideration that the novel is concerned with a young man's development is enough to cause D. G. Jones to compare it with Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. He links Duddy and Stephen by claiming that "Duddy Kravitz's cry of 'I don't care' is the cruder North American version of Stephen Daedalus's [sic] 'Non serviam'."<sup>30</sup> As A. R. Bevan has pointed out, Duddy is not really meant to be considered in such company, because he is "much less of a man"<sup>31</sup> than Stephen Dedalus. Not as rebellious as Noah Adler,

<sup>29</sup>

Son of a Smaller Hero, p. 168.

<sup>30</sup>

D. G. Jones, Butterfly on Rock (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 29.

<sup>31</sup>

A. R. Bevan, "The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz", in G. David Sheps, ed., Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Mordecai Richler (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1971), p. 85.

Duddy illustrates the harmful, stultifying effects of remaining within the Jewish community.

At first sight, his materialism and monomaniacal desire to possess land almost force the reader into agreeing with the evaluation voiced by Duddy's enemy Irwin Schubert: Duddy appears to be no more than a "cretinous little money-grubber".<sup>32</sup> This estimation is only partly correct. Even in his youth Duddy exhibits a remarkable desire as well as a talent for making money. With markets in fields as diverse as pornographic comic books and stolen hockey sticks, Duddy seems to his uncle as well a "busy, conniving little yid".<sup>33</sup> Yet Uncle Benjy is willing to admit that his estimation of Duddy as a grasping materialist might be wrong: "There's more to you than mere money-lust, Duddy, but I'm afraid for you. You're two people, that's why. The scheming little bastard I saw so easily and the fine, intelligent boy underneath that your grandfather, bless him, saw."<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately, the baser side of his nature appears to win out by the conclusion of the novel. As Bevan suggests, "all the other potential people present in the boy have been murdered by the scheming little bastard."<sup>35</sup> However, there

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<sup>32</sup> Mordecai Richler, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz (7th ed.; Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 68.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>35</sup> Bevan, p. 87.

are reasons for Duddy's seemingly ruthless behavior.

One is his desire to make money in order to make his mark on the world. He thinks to himself after he has been tricked by Irwin Schubert, "It's not always going to be like this. If you want to bet on something then bet on me. I'm going to be a somebody and that's for sure."<sup>36</sup> Although this type of attitude makes the reader painfully conscious of Duddy as a Horatio Alger figure, his motives are more complex than that. While it is true that Duddy considers riches as the prime indication of success, The Apprenticeship is more than a simple "rags-to-riches"<sup>37</sup> story, as one observer terms Duddy's career.

A major excuse for some of Duddy's excesses is his belief in the truth of his grandfather Simcha's dictum that "A man without land is nobody."<sup>38</sup> The obsession to own the land around the lake is largely prompted by Duddy's wish to present his grandfather with a farm. As Woodcock points out, Duddy's love for his grandfather is the closest relationship in the novel: "Only his grandfather appears to love him, and that is why he accepts as his gospel old Simcha's cant phrase. . . he clings to the most simple loyalty of all,

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<sup>36</sup>

The Apprenticeship, p. 95.

<sup>37</sup>

Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>38</sup>

Ibid., p. 48.

loyalty to his family."<sup>39</sup>

The relationship between Duddy and his grandfather is an unlikely alliance between the Old World mentality and that of the New. Simcha's contemporaries, not as emotionally involved with Duddy as he is, instinctively distrust the boy, for he seems to negate their Old World values, to threaten their way of life: "The round-shouldered old men looked at Duddy and decided he was mean, a crafty boy, and they hoped he would not hurt Simcha too hard."<sup>40</sup> Simcha's advice is actually an Old World dream, an empty phrase that Duddy chooses to interpret literally.

Duddy's loyalty to the rest of his family seems at times almost as mindless as his belief in his grandfather's phrase. He remains remarkably faithful to members of his family who at times misunderstand him as much as outsiders do. His father Max tends to consider him an ignorant equal. Uncle Benjy begins a long feud when he reprimands Duddy for informing on one of his employees. Both Max and Benjy ignore Duddy and idolize his brother Lennie, the medical student. Yet in spite of the favoritism shown his brother, and the resentment he sometimes feels because of this, Duddy selflessly helps him when he is in need. In a similar manner, he attempts to patch up an age-old quarrel between Simcha and

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<sup>39</sup> Woodcock, p. 39.

<sup>40</sup> The Apprenticeship, p. 48.

Benjy before the latter's death. He, too, brings Aunt Ida home from New York to visit her dying husband. This sense of family solidarity is one of Duddy's marked traits, a stronger loyalty, in fact, than his kinship with the Jews.

It is true that Richler hints at a conflict between Jew and Gentile by describing anti-Semitic teachers who taught Duddy and by mentioning that there is a limited number of Jews admitted to the university. However, Duddy is not meant to represent Jewish identity struggling against gentile oppression. His biggest enemy, Jerry Dingleman, is Jewish, and Duddy himself seems to take the matter of his heritage rather casually. He is even able to make fun of his nationality when he discovers that an anti-Semitic farmer owns the land that both he and Dingleman want: he tells his secretary to inform the farmer that "Dingleman is the biggest, fattest, dirtiest goddam Jew who ever lived. If he gets hold of that land he's going to build a synagogue on it."<sup>41</sup>

Duddy's loyalties are strongest to his family, not to his race.

He does, however, possess the unpleasant tendency of considering the Jews as a select minority constantly preyed upon by the Gentiles. When a Goy offends him in a business transaction, Duddy lapses into a string of curses, accusing

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<sup>41</sup>

Ibid., p. 288.

the man of anti-Semitism. When asked if his relationship with his secretary Yvette is serious, he amazedly asks: how it could be, since she is a shiksa.

This elitism on Duddy's part makes it difficult to understand William H. New's evaluation of him as a character not tainted by the ghetto mentality of a Cohen: "Duddy's place remains in the Gentile world. His [sic] is therefore different from Cohen, who says: 'We're two of a kind, you know. . . A plague on all the goyim, that's my motto.' He is different because, for Duddy, this is not a satisfactory guide; he cannot choose to align himself on religious terms." <sup>42</sup> It is true that Duddy does not choose to "align himself on religious terms", but neither does Cohen. Both Duddy and Cohen, however, seem only too willing to consider themselves as part of the Chosen People.

Richler implies that this type of mentality, this vision of the Jewish community as a beleaguered fortress in the middle of a gentile wilderness, is rather outmoded. In an interview with Nathan Cohen, granted at the time when he was writing A Choice of Enemies, Richler stated:

One of the things I was most concerned with in Son of a Smaller Hero was that it seems to me that class loyalties in Montreal were much stronger than so-called Jewish loyalties or traditions; that the middle-class Jew has much more in common with the middle-class Gentile than he has with the Jew who

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works for him in his factory.

These class distinctions are apparent in The Apprenticeship as well. The community is breaking up, the rich Jews moving from the Main to Outremont. The established Jews treat the newly-arrived "greeners" contemptuously. Another indication of the lack of harmony in the community is the scene which describes an orthodox Jew retreating from the synagogue of a progressive rabbi because it looks like a church.

The family, too, is as fragmented as the community. Just as Jerry Dingleman's wealth makes him a pillar of the community, Uncle Benjy's riches make him the true head of the Kravitz family, for he displaces Max. Uncle Benjy's usurpation of Max's role as Lennie's father hints at the fragile nature of the family unit. Perhaps the scene in which Max, Lennie and Duddy achieve a rare moment of harmony is the best example of how delicate the balance in the family is. There is an embarrassed moment which exposes Duddy's feelings for his father: "Standing behind his father he reached out to touch him. Gently, however, almost surreptitiously,  
44 just in case he moved away."

The sense of exclusiveness, of solidarity, exhibited by both Duddy and Cohen hints at a certain immaturity of

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Nathan Cohen, "A Conversation with Mordecai Richler", in G. David Sheps, ed., Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Mordecai Richler (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1971), p. 32.

44  
The Apprenticeship, p. 293.



outlook. William H. New, although considering Duddy not affected by this type of attitude, nevertheless makes an interesting comment in his analysis of the novel: "The very defences that protect against any envelopment by the 'alien' culture preserve the St. Urbain Street childhood identity as well."<sup>45</sup> For Duddy Kravitz retains his "St. Urbain Street childhood identity" throughout the novel.

Although Richler uses Duddy as the innocent against which the follies of the characters surrounding him are contrasted, there is a disturbing side to his ingenuous nature. Duddy seems at times another manifestation of the "dangerously small man" that Noah Adler saw in Shloime. The most significant example of his immaturity is his reaction when he sees Virgil, the epileptic he has befriended, lying senseless after Duddy has forged a check in his name. The scene is reminiscent of McPherson's coming upon his dying wife, summoned from her sickbed by a prank phonecall from Duddy in his youth. The similarity of the two scenes suggests that Duddy has not matured in the interval between his schooldays and his early manhood, for in both instances he seeks to avoid responsibility for his actions.

His childishness is also apparent in his desire for a melodramatic death that would cause those who have misunderstood or abused him to feel sorry for their transgressions. This lack of development would tend to explain, though not

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<sup>45</sup>

New, p. 72.

excuse, some of his baser actions. One of his cardinal sins, for example, is his maltreatment of Virgil and Yvette. It is true that he exploits them ruthlessly, that by the novel's end he has, as Woodcock points out, "destroyed the weak and naive Virgil; he has rejected the clear image of Yvette's decency".<sup>46</sup> However, it seems too simple to view Duddy merely as an unprincipled villain. What is terrifying about his character is that he has not developed a moral sense during his apprenticeship. Although his childlike innocence and naiveté at times have a certain charm, he also possesses the ruthlessness of a self-centered child in his actions.

This disturbing aspect of his nature is emphasized in his triumph over the Boy Wonder. The two confront each other on the land that Duddy has managed to acquire in spite of Dingleman's opposition. The conversation between them takes on the overtones of a squabble between two boys in an alley. Linda, who accompanies the Boy Wonder, tells Duddy that he is a "big boy now",<sup>47</sup> and so he seems. As he drives Dingleman away, Duddy sounds like an adolescent who has finally bested a rival:<sup>48</sup> "I'm the king of the castle here, sonny."

The figure of Duddy Kravitz proved fascinating

<sup>46</sup>

Woodcock, p. 42.

<sup>47</sup>

The Apprenticeship, p. 309.

<sup>48</sup>

Ibid., p. 311.

enough to cause Richler to include him in his latest novel, St. Urbain's Horseman. The Duddy of the earlier novel, wandering about his lake, lost in a blizzard, thought to himself, "Moses. . . died without ever reaching the Promised Land, but <sup>49</sup> I've got my future to think of." The Duddy portrayed in St. Urbain's Horseman has reached his Promised Land.

He has made his million dollars, basing his fortune on such questionable ventures as a diet pill which contains a tapeworm. Richler portrays him as much the same clever con artist as in the earlier novel. Just as he managed to unload a disastrous film of a bar-mitzvah on the boy's parents by appealing to their inherent snobbery in The Apprenticeship, the Duddy of St. Urbain's Horseman is equally aware of his people's prejudices. One of his early enterprises is a Canadian Jewish Who's Who, which, as the circular sent to prospective subscription members claims, is no ordinary book: "Their names, they were informed, had been selected as community leaders by an exacting and distinguished committee, for it was not possible to buy your way into an epoch-making compendium that was destined to become part and parcel of our incomparable Jewish heritage."<sup>50</sup>

The character has changed, however, in spite of his equally clever manipulations. The middle-aged Duddy lacks the

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<sup>49</sup>

Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>50</sup>

St. Urbain's Horseman, p. 169.

vitality and the naïveté of the character depicted in the earlier novel. He is dominated by his wife and disillusioned with the world. He longs for a son in order to bestow upon him the benefits of his struggle. He has come to resemble Cohen the scrap-dealer from The Apprenticeship, the man who played the Evil Angel to Uncle Benjy's Good Angel when Duddy was vacillating between becoming a "gentleman", as his uncle advised him, or believing Cohen who told him that they were "two of a kind".<sup>51</sup> The only satisfaction that he can attain from his wealth is flaunting it in the faces of his old classmates. He tells Jake his motives for organizing a class reunion: "I had my secretary check out everybody who was in room forty-one with us. Of all the guys, I'm the only millionaire. Let them come to my place and choke on it, don't you think?"<sup>52</sup>

St. Urbain's Horseman demonstrates some other interesting changes as well. The novel reveals a Richler who looks back with a certain amount of amusement at his earlier views and preoccupations. The imprecations against Canada's limited artistic life, for instance, voiced by André Bennett in The Acrobats and satirised in The Incomparable Atuk, have been replaced by a grudging admission that perhaps the country's cultural horizons are not all that limited. Jake

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<sup>51</sup> The Apprenticeship, p. 265.

<sup>52</sup> St. Urbain's Horseman, p. 460.

Hersh, who seems to voice the opinions of a less critical Richler, feels ties with the country that he had deserted as a cultural desert: "Tomorrow country then, tomorrow country now. And yet -- and yet -- he felt increasingly claimed by it".<sup>53</sup> Through his mouthpiece Jake, Richler drops hints which imply that his previous criticism might have been a trifle harsh:

As his father had blamed the goyim for his own inadequacies, mentally billing them for the sum of his misfortunes, so Jake had foolishly held Canada culpable for all his discontents. Coming to London, finding it considerably less than excellent, he was at once deprived of this security blanket.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, Canadians are accorded a certain amount of praise, for they are considered by Jake to be the true representatives of the age:

amid so many exiles from nineteenth-century tyranny, heirs to injustices that could actually be set right politically, thereby lending themselves to constructive angers, only the Canadians, surprisingly, were true children of their times. Only they had packed their bags and left home to escape the hell of boredom. And find it everywhere.<sup>55</sup>

The youthful flight to Europe as to a cultural Mecca was seriously treated by Richler in his earlier novels. Both André Bennett and Noah Adler came to Europe because Montreal, and Canada, were inhibiting. Norman Price of A Choice of

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

Enemies and Mortimer Griffin of Cocksure, similarly, were expatriates. Jake Hersh, however, has doubts about Europe's magical properties. Perhaps the scene which best illustrates Richler's changed attitude towards the questing, artistic youth is the conversation between the young Jake Hersh and his father before the former's first attempt at emigration. The quest for artistic identity is treated ironically where previously, as in Son of a Smaller Hero, the flight was considered the only way of preserving oneself:

"I thought I'd go to New York for a start and look around. It's time I found out who I am."  
 "What do you mean, who you are? You're Yankel Hersh. You want to bet on it, I'll give you odds."<sup>56</sup>

Jake Hersh has progressed to a state beyond the doubts and rebellions that plagued the heroes of Richler's earlier novels. Not as contemptuous of Canadian culture as André Bennett, nor as reticent to admit his Jewish heritage as Noah Adler, he is a middle-aged man taking stock of himself. Worried about the times and his place in them, his children and how to raise them, Jake reflects a Richler who, amazingly enough, seems to have mellowed.

The little world of the Montreal Jewish community which Jake flees to establish a new one, is described in much the same terms as in Son of a Smaller Hero. Jake, however, upon his return to Montreal to attend at his father's

funeral, considers the community not so much a repressive cage, as Noah Adler had, but a comfortingly anachronistic shelter from the turbulent world:

he could not properly mourn for his father. He felt cradled, not deprived. He also felt like Rip Van Winkle returned to an innocent and ordered world he had mistakenly believed long extinct. Where God watched over all, doing His sums. Where everything fit. Even the holocaust which, after all, had yielded the state of Israel.<sup>57</sup>

In fact, Jake is even willing to admit that his flight from the ghetto, far from being a cataclysmic bid for freedom from repression, is rather stereotyped. The Jewish liberal, it seems, has degenerated into a mere conformist from the daring rebel of previous generations:

Given his curriculum vitae, orthodox Jewish background, emergent working class, urban Canadian, his life until now read to him like any Jewish intellectual journeyman's case history. To begin with, his zeyda was a cliché. A gentle Jew. A chess player. His childhood street fights, the stuff of everybody's protest novel, lacked only one trite detail. Nobody had ever said to him, "You killed Christ." . . . At fifteen he had been sufficiently puerile to tell his father, "The synagogue is full of hypocrites," and two years later he had the originality to describe himself as. . . ghetto-liberated.

If, rather than a code of unspoken nonconformities, there was a battery of written tests for intellectual novices, then Jake felt he would have passed top of the letter-day yeshiva class. He had done all the right wrong things, even to marrying a shiksa. . .<sup>58</sup>

However, just as Noah's rebellion was contrasted to the uprisings of Ida and Shloime in Son of a Smaller Hero, Jake's flight from the ghetto is contrasted to that of Jenny

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<sup>57</sup>

Ibid., p. 396.

<sup>58</sup>

Ibid., p. 303.

who marries a gentile screenwriter to escape Montreal. Free at last, she defines her whole existence by believing that she is a constant source of shame to her family, while in actuality they have long forgotten her. Her assertions of individuality at times seem no more than pathetic, childish cries to be noticed by the community she has abandoned:

"I suppose whenever my name's mentioned they cross themselves, so to speak," she said, giggling at her own joke.

He hadn't the heart to say her name had not been mentioned once. . . .<sup>59</sup>

Jake, on the other hand, remains conscious of his Jewish heritage. Ironically, the traditions he had believed he had left in Montreal affect him in spite of his efforts to forget them. At times, for instance, he feels uncomfortably like an alien in the new world he has adopted, much as his parents must have felt in Canada: "As a St. Urbain Street boy he had, God forgive him, been ashamed of his parents' Yiddish accent. Now that he lived in Hampstead, Sammy (and soon Molly and Ben too, he supposed) mocked his immigrant's twang."<sup>60</sup> Thus the Richler protagonist, finally established in Europe as a paterfamilias, proves that the son is not all that much different from the father. Life is a "circle", a "little kikeleh",<sup>61</sup> as Jake realizes when he rushes to the

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<sup>59</sup>

Ibid., p. 397.

<sup>60</sup>

Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>61</sup>

Ibid., p. 383.



country for a weekend, "bound to join his family in Newquay for the sabbath, just as years and years ago, his father had descended on them in flybitten Shawbridge, the ghetto's summer swimming hole".<sup>62</sup>

However, Jake looks back with mixed feelings on his Jewish heritage. At times, confronted with the mysteries of the gentile world, he seeks refuge in his Jewish past to bolster an offended ego. Thus, when he feels put out by his wife's mastery of the art of gardening, he is solaced by the consideration that there are some mysteries in which he is the initiate, she the wondering onlooker:

Bloody shiksa, he thought, seething inwardly, Ontario hick, you don't know the Holy One's Secret Name, the sayings of Rabbi Akiba, or how to exorcise a dybbuk, but you would know that sort of crap, and he retreated to the living room to sulk and study his newly acquired gardening manuals. The Orangeman's Talmud.<sup>63</sup>

This tendency of viewing oneself as a member of the community of the Chosen People is a favorite target of Richler's satire. The militant Hyman Rosen of Cocksure, for example, has his counterpart in St. Urbain's Horseman in the character of Harry Stein. Jake's co-defendant in the trial for sexual offences, Harry is an embittered little man who feels subjected by the powers that deny him the pleasure he craves. Harry's ethnic prejudices are treated satirically

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Ibid.

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Ibid., p. 283.

in the description of his opening statement to the court. Asked about his religion as he is being sworn in, he answers, " 'For purposes of census, taxation, and pogroms,' Harry proclaimed in a swelling voice, his St. Crispin's Day voice, to the somnolent court room, 'I am a Jew.' " <sup>64</sup> Similarly, Richler satirizes the Jewish identity in the depiction of Moey Hanover, a former student of rabbinical law. Having progressed somewhat higher in the social scale, and moving in different circles, Moey nevertheless does not forget his training. The Talmudic scholar's ability to debate the fine points of logic is now used by Moey to excuse his sexual dalliances.

Though not possessed of a religious nature, nor of a militantly Jewish temperament, Jake worries at times about his children being brought up with a mixed heritage. Given to fantasizing scenes of his son not knowing what a kaddish is at his funeral, while his daughter refuses to tell her children that they are one quarter Jewish, Jake occasionally feels positively shaken by the double heritage he is trying to transmit to them:

Yuletide was, in any event, an uneasy season for Jake, the tree in the living room an affront no matter how rationally he explained it away to himself. As a fertility symbol. As a pagan ritual. As Nancy's birth-right, and the children's, for after all they did spring from both traditions, and in Hersh's half-breed house they did not festoon the tree with anything but inter-faith baubles. Which is to say, there was no haloed Yoshka riding over all. And yet -- and yet -- hang

it with chocolate Santas, spray it with silver, drape it with colored balls, even rub it down with chicken fat, if you like, and, by God, it was still a Christmas tree. His forebears hadn't fled the shtetl, surviving the Czar, so that the windows of the second generation should glitter on Christmas Eve, like those of the Black Hundreds of accursed memory.<sup>65</sup>

The mixed heritage has a beneficial aspect as well, however, for with their double inheritance, the children will not be confronted with the same crises that Richler's Jewish protagonists must usually face. A generation advanced in the process of assimilation, they fit into both the Jewish and the gentile worlds:

They were a new breed, these mixed-marriage kids. With a Christmas tree in December and matzo's in April. Instead of being unwanted, hounded here for being Christ-killers, mocked there for being bland WASPS, they belonged everywhere. With a stake in Jehovah and a claim on Christ. A taste for hot cross buns and bagels.<sup>66</sup>

The children, thus, will not have to face the problem of alienation that Jake endures, caught as he is between the fashionable world of London and the ghetto of Montreal.

Yet Jake's Jewish heritage also causes him to fear for his children. Mindful of the sufferings of his people, he dreads bequeathing a similar legacy upon his family:

Then, in Jake's Jewish nightmare, they come. Into his house. The extermination officers seeking out the Jew vermin. Ben is seized by the legs like a chicken and heaved out of the window, his brains spilling to the terrace. Molly, whose experience has

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<sup>65</sup>

Ibid., pp. 285-286.

<sup>66</sup>

Ibid., pp. 280-281.

led her to believe all adults gentle, is raised in the air not to be tossed and tickled, but to be flung against the brick fireplace. Sammy is dispatched with a pistol.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, while Jake is conscious of bestowing a tradition, no matter how diluted, upon his children, he also dreads the heritage of suffering that he transmits to them. His "Jewish nightmare" is enhanced by his fear that his happiness with his family is undeserved, that some implacable fate will someday demand a payment for the pleasures he has received. In the midst of world-wide suffering, violence and misery, he remains wary that he should be blessed with good fortune. His worries cause him to envision his home as a fortress, surrounded by the forces of evil. Where Noah Adler had fled the ghetto ruled over by his grandfather Melech, Jake, a later manifestation of the youthful rebel, finds himself in the position of defending his own little world. However, the difference remains that Jake's "ghetto" lacks the strength and the moral support of a community.

This sense of being marooned in a hostile territory, sole defender of a small household, contributes to Jake's inherent paranoia. Not only does he distrust the world surrounding him, but his own body seems an untrustworthy ally, ever in danger of contracting cancer. This sense of paranoia is not only a result of his cultural heritage, but a

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Ibid., p. 73.

facet of the legacy of his times. The crisis of identity is not solely provoked by his Jewish background, but by the society of the Gentiles as well. Thus, although Jake, as an aging liberal, feels himself to be one of a generation with a hardly momentous function in the world's history ("Ever observers, never participants. The whirlwind elsewhere."<sup>68</sup>), he considers himself part of a generation trapped, not placed, between two others:

As it seemed to Jake that his generation was now being squeezed between two reging and carnivorous ones, the old and resentful have-everythings and the young know-nothings, the insurance brokers defending themselves against the fire-raisers, it followed inevitably that, once having stumbled,<sup>69</sup> he would be judged by one when accused by the other.

Paranoid as he is, Jake is rather relieved when he is accused of sexually assaulting an an pair girl, even though he is innocent of the charge. He considers the trial as the inevitable result of the happiness he has enjoyed, the accounting his good fortune necessitates:

Elijah the Prophet had disappointed him, never coming to sip from his silver wine cup at the Passover table. Not so the vandals. After years of waiting somebody had at last come to ask him, Jacob Hersh, husband, father, son, house owner, investor, sybarite, film fantasy-spinner, for an accounting.<sup>70</sup>

Jake's doubts and fears are finally crystallized in the shape of the trial. Suspicious of his joyful past, guilt-

<sup>68</sup>

Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>69</sup>

Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>70</sup>

Ibid., p. 89.

ridden because he has thus far remained unscathed in a chaotic world, Jake is relieved in spite of the injustice of the charge against him:

he was more exhilarated than depressed by the trial because at last the issues had been joined. Joined, after a fashion. From the beginning, he had expected the outer, brutalized world to intrude on their little one, inflated with love but ultimately self-serving and cocooned by money. . . And so, from the earliest, halcyon days with Nancy, he had expected the coming of the vandals.<sup>71</sup>

The successful outcome of the trial not only helps Jake to rid himself of his guilt feelings, but also suggests that their little world, having endured the "coming of the vandals", is strong enough to survive in spite of the "outer, brutalized world".

The little world Jake has established in England lacks the moral and spiritual absolutes of the ghetto he has abandoned. Thus, unwittingly, he transforms Cousin Joey, his youthful hero, into a guiding light, "oddly convinced that somehow Joey had answers for him."<sup>72</sup>

Part of Joey's original attraction was caused by his rebellious nature. As intolerant of the Hershes as his father Beruch, Joey was ostracized by the Montreal Jewish community. Although the clannishness of the community is satirized in Mrs. Hersh's comment, "In a crisis we always

<sup>71</sup>

Ibid., pp. 88-89.

<sup>72</sup>

Ibid., p. 230.

stick together. . . Many outstanding sociologists have observed that",<sup>73</sup> the Hersh family is as tightly knit and as intolerant of unorthodoxy as the Adlers of Son of a Smaller Hero. Jake, having cast himself in the role of loner, sides with Joey, the Horseman, before his departure for England.

The Horseman comes to mean more to Jake than an admirable non-conformist. In London, faced by the chaos of a disillusioning world, Jake begins to mythologize Joey, ennobling him until the rebellious cousin becomes a source of inspiration and moral support. As equally removed from the worries and fears of Jake's society as he is from the complacent world of Jake's uncles, Joey becomes in Jake's eyes a mythical Horseman, searching the jungles for Nazi war criminals, fighting in Israel, a "Jewish Batman".<sup>74</sup>

Jake, however, does not immediately realize the importance he is attaching to the noble cousin. One evening, after putting the children to bed, he wonders about his son's asking him what he believes in, if he does not believe in God: "Retreating from their bedroom, troubled, he grasped that for years now he had begun to insinuate tales of St. Urbain's Horseman between his bedtime stories about Rabbi Akiba, the Thirty-Six Just Men, Maimonides, the Golem, Trumpeldor, and Leon Trotsky. His Jewish allsorts bag."<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

The disturbing realization is not that Joey has become a hero-figure to him, but that his function has become much more significant. At a time when there is no system of values, when standards are indefinite, "the Horseman had become [Jake's] moral editor": "he tried above all to please the Horseman. For somewhere he was watching, judging. Once Cousin Joey's advocate, he was now his acolyte."<sup>76</sup>

Cousin Joey, however, is an ambiguous figure. While Jake insists that the Horseman is a hero, his uncle considers him a blackmailer and a gigolo. Certainly the novel provides evidence that the uncle's vision of Joey is closer to the truth. Richler nevertheless implies that Jake's idealistic concept of the Horseman deserves to be preserved.

The necessity of maintaining the illusion is hinted at in the description of Jake's reaction to the news of Joey's death. He seems to realize that his vision might be overly fond when he picks up the Horseman's pistol, only to find that it fires blanks. Nevertheless, he wakes up in the night to retrieve the journal in which he had entered the date of the Horseman's death, crosses out the entry, and writes above it "presumed dead".

The hero-figure, no matter how illusory, thus becomes a necessary moral support. The true Joey is replaced by the



mythical figure, for, as Jake realizes, there is more than one version of the truth: "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>77</sup> When the Horseman is resurrected at the novel's conclusion, he is more than a romantic rebel, a "self-justifying image" to Jake. His belief in the personal hero, the mythical Horseman, is confirmed. Jake is finally mature enough not to live without the Horseman, but to live with him.

Thus, although the Richler protagonist, abandoning the pose of the youthful rebel, has progressed to a point where he can uneasily reconcile his Jewish identity with his role in the gentile world, there is still much that Richler considers worthy of criticism in Jewish life. A comparison of The Second Scroll and St. Urbain's Horseman, the protagonists of which two novels are largely autobiographical, would provide some indications of the manner in which the two authors are at odds in their beliefs. Not only do their opinions on the reborn state of Israel differ, but in these two novels the authors present varying treatments of the Jew-

ish community, its religious heads, and its enemies. Interestingly enough, these differences in attitude are perhaps most clearly expressed in the treatments of the ideal heroes depicted by Klein and Richler. Uncle Melech of The Second Scroll and Cousin Joey of St. Urbain's Horseman are personal heroes to the protagonists of the two novels. However, although the narrators resemble each other in their respective quests for the embodied ideal, the quest motif is used for different purposes in both novels. Thus, a comparison of the relationship between the protagonist and his hero-figure would provide a further indication of the manner in which Klein's and Richler's visions of the Jewish community and identity diverge. Chapter III, then, will be devoted to a discussion of The Second Scroll and St. Urbain's Horseman.

### CHAPTER III

The anxiety accompanying discussions of Jewish identity is greatest among secular Jews and least among the orthodox.<sup>1</sup>

The state of Israel, whose independence Klein celebrated in The Second Scroll, underwent the agonies of war and further struggle during the twenty years that separate The Second Scroll from Richler's St. Urbain's Horseman. The fighting led to the victory of the Six-Day War, but Richler's novel, which is partly concerned with the conflict in Israel and the Jewish victory, lacks the sense of fulfilment discernible in Klein's work. This lack might be partly explained by the fact that Richler, unlike Klein, does not possess the awareness, or at least belief, in a tradition necessary to interpret historical events in a religious context, to consider Israeli victory as the fulfilment of a Divine Covenant. Richler views Jewish history with the eye of a partly assimilated Jew as well as that of a satirist, thus the religious context and the optimistic sensibility would be incongruous in his work. In any case, a comparison of The Second Scroll and St. Urbain's Horseman would provide some interesting indications of how two Jewish-Canadian

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Guttman, The Jewish Writer in America: Assimilation and the Crisis of Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 11.

writers, living in a foreign environment, react both to their heritage and to the liberation of the land of their forefathers.

Before comparing the two authors' varying sensibilities, however, it would perhaps be helpful to discuss an essay of Richler's which describes a visit to Israel he made in 1962. The essay "This Year in Jerusalem" from the collection Hunting Tigers Under Glass provides some interesting background material to the description of Jake Hersh's journey to Israel in St. Urbain's Horseman. Not only does the essay lend support to the argument that the novel is partly autobiographical by linking Richler and the protagonist Jake Hersh through the descriptions of similar incidents and reactions, but some of the scenes and characters mentioned in the essay recur in St. Urbain's Horseman. The assimilated Mr. Cooper of the novel, for example, has his origins in Mr. Ginsburg, who mouths the same commonplaces as his later manifestation. Richler seems to have changed the character's name in the novel to indicate the incongruity of his presence in the Holy Land. In the essay the country's commercialism is hinted at in the description of the owner of the Desert Inn Hotel. Ironically, the Desert Inn described in "This Year in Jerusalem" was to become the Arabian Nights Hotel of the novel. But the essay is noteworthy not merely because it provides some indication of how Richler changes and adapts previously published material before in-

cluding it in a novel.

The significance of "This Year in Jerusalem" is that it depicts Israel as a country that is far from the supposedly ideal community envisioned by Klein that has endured war to establish a unified Jewish state. The Israel Richler describes is a collection of individual groups, separated into factions by religion, age, ideology, and social status.

The return of the exiled Jews of various nationalities to Israel, for example, inevitably causes some friction. The influx of tourists from America, emigrants from Europe, and Jews from North Africa results in an uneasy alliance among individuals of differing social status and belief. Some of the Jews have emigrated to Israel for questionable purposes. A number of those who stay after the first few disillusioning years, for example, are motivated more by hatred of the countries they have left than by love for the country they have adopted. The Eastern European Jews, on the other hand, consider Israel as a stopping place before the eventual journey to America. Ironically, the return to Israel results in some unforeseen identity crises: "It is one of the smaller ironies of Israeli life that immigrants from Canada, England, and the U.S.A., who often left their countries because the Anglo-Saxons there made them feel unwanted, are, in Israel, called Anglo-Saxons themselves."<sup>2</sup>

The conflicts among the various Jews of differing national origins results in socio-economic and religious disputes as well. For instance, the appointment of Western Jews to higher offices while Kurds, Yemenites, and Moroccans fill the lowlier positions leads to "a color problem in Israel".<sup>3</sup> These racial distinctions also cause some curious religious debates. The altercations are not always prompted by political and economic considerations: "One might expect that all groups were at least united by dint of their shared wait for the Messiah, but even here there is cause for dispute. The Yemenites are sure that when the Messiah comes he will be a dark Jew; the Poles insist he will surely be white, like themselves."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the clearest indication of the lack of harmony among the Jews is the relation between the natives and the tourists returning to Israel or visiting it for the first time. The tourists treat the Israelis condescendingly, while they, in turn, shut their doors at their approach, indignant at being treated like curiosities. The strained relations between tourists and natives were described by Klein in The Second Scroll. Apparently the visitors' vulgarity and naiveté characterized them during Klein's visit as much as during Richler's. Possessed of a "singular incomprehension

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

of the ideals that were building the State",<sup>5</sup> the tourists in Israel after the War of Independence irritated Klein; patronising, constantly complaining, they were unpopular among the inhabitants as well:

They persisted in telling the natives how such and such a thing was better arranged in their own countries. They photographed everything, including the "inmates" of refugee camps, who surprised their visitors by refusing to be treated as exhibits. They were disappointed, these pilgrims, when they found that not everyone in Israel wore sidecurls, observed the Blue Sabbaths, prayed thrice daily; in their home towns at the chicken dinners where they had so valiantly wrested their heritage from the hands of the usurper, they had dreamed, apparently, of Israel as of a great Established Synagogue devoted to an incessant praying for the salvation of the souls of its materialist benefactors.<sup>6</sup>

Richler similarly criticizes the naive image of the country that the tourists cherish, but, as a native points out, the fond vision is now being exploited:

But for the middle-aged tourists from America, the old-time Zionists, this has to be paradise and no criticism is possible. They come here as to heaven on earth and they want it pure, not filled with quarreling human beings. Those old men would cut off their fingers for Israel. It's true they wouldn't settle here, but they will pay for it. They are, in a sense, the backbone of the Israeli economy. . . . They come here to be delighted by Jewish cops, a Jewish army, well, they have to pay for it.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, while both Richler and Klein agree that the "materialist benefactors" are loutish and naive, there is a disturbing

<sup>5</sup>The Second Scroll, p. 80.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid..

<sup>7</sup>"This Year in Jerusalem", p. 151.

difference in the reaction to them in the Israel of Richler's time. The materialism that Klein deplored has become a condition of life even in the Holy Land, and the vulgar tourists have paradoxically become necessary to the state's existence. As a result, where Klein mocks their "incomprehension of the ideals that were building the State", Richler describes a state in which the ideals have drastically altered. In spite of the protestations of "We're a new kind of Jew here"<sup>8</sup> that Richler constantly hears in Israel, there remains the disturbing admission voiced by an Israeli: "If you mean. . . 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>9</sup> Richler appears to doubt the validity of the assertion. In the sole compliment paid to the tourists upon whose generosity the Jewish economy is founded, he implies that the state they have created is rather disillusioning: "the flawed reality of Israel was a testimony to their generosity."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, ironically, the Promised Land, the religious centre of the Jews, has transformed itself into a secular society. Religious orthodoxy is not convenient in a modern state, as Richler implies in the depiction of a militantly

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<sup>8</sup>  
Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>9</sup>  
Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>10</sup>  
Ibid., p. 164.



orthodox young Jew buying a bottle of cognac, irritating the shopkeeper with his question of whether the liquor is kosher or not. But orthodoxy is also frowned upon by the other progressive elements of the new society: "Orthodox Jews are not enormously popular in Israel. They are considered a throw-back to the ghetto."<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the best single indication of the changing times is the conversation between the owner and two stockholders of a new hotel. The stockholders invert the traditional Passover prayer of "Jerusalem, next year", virtually transforming the exile's prayer into a demonic parody: "You know how they say 'Next year in Jerusalem'? Well, we'll be saying 'Next year at the Desert Inn'."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, religion seems to have degenerated to mere spectacle in this description of a guided tour:

Inside one small dank synagogue, God's name was spelled out in neon lights over the Holy Ark. In the Yemenite shul, the last one we visited, the guide announced, "In this synagogue, the rabbi will come out and bless all of you."

A decrepit old man, wearing a fez, came out and muttered a prayer.

"You have now been blessed," the guide said. "Anybody who wants to shake hands with the rabbi is now free to do so."<sup>13</sup>

The "flawed reality" of Israel is a far cry from the unified reborn state envisioned by Klein in The Second Scroll.

<sup>11</sup>

Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>12</sup>

Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>13</sup>

Ibid., p. 156.

Richler describes it as a conglomeration of splinter groups and political factions instead of as the Promised Land which Klein foresaw where the Chosen People could again become the community rejoined after the Diaspora. There is no sense of a common, shared set of beliefs among the people in the Israel Richler describes. On the one hand, militant young Jews return to Israel and give up their American citizenships in order to assert their Jewish identities, while on the other, Rabbi Binyamin Mendelson preaches that "Zionism and nationalism were responsible for the Nazi holocaust. Zionism prevented the coming of the Messiah, which would have saved Jewry."<sup>14</sup>

Tom Marshall has suggested that Klein's utopianism, his idealised vision of Israel, causes him to unrealistically ignore "political and moral issues": "his conception of Israel as the road back to Eden places too heavy a burden on that beleaguered and struggling nation-state."<sup>15</sup> Compared to Richler's description of Israel, Klein's vision does indeed seem overly fond. Yet Klein's hopeful conception of a re-born state becomes understandable in the light of his previous work and his lifelong concern with the land and the traditions of his people. Given his previous agonizing over

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<sup>14</sup>

Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>15</sup>

Tom Marshall, "Introduction: Canada's A. M. Klein", in his Critical Views on Canadian Writers: A. M. Klein (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970), p. xiv.

Israel's captivity, the sense of fulfilment at the establishment of the state apparent throughout The Second Scroll would only naturally lead to the vision of the country as the New Jerusalem. As if to demonstrate his awareness that his utopian vision is rather romantic, Klein has the materialist Settano tell the autobiographical narrator of The Second Scroll, "You are, I see, definitely not a realist."<sup>16</sup>

The contrast between Klein's utopian vision and Richler's ironic sensibility becomes even more apparent when one compares The Second Scroll with St. Urbain's Horseman. The treatment of the state of Israel remains much the same in Richler's St. Urbain's Horseman as it was in "This Year in Jerusalem". An interesting contrast occurs in the use by both Klein and Richler of a similar term to denote the rebirth of the state. In The Second Scroll Klein describes how, in a moment of epiphany, he had glimpsed the "key image" of the new state, and the single appropriate word to summarize its poetry: "And now in Israel the phenomenon was being made everywhere explicit. The fixed epithet wherewith I might designate Israel's poetry, the poetry of the recaptured time, was now evident. The password was heard everywhere -- the miracle! I had found the key image."<sup>17</sup> Richler

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<sup>16</sup>

The Second Scroll, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup>

Ibid., p. 87.

uses the same word in a description of the country two decades later. A portly tourist accosts Jake Herish by the pool of the Garden Hotel in Ramat-Aviv. After inquiring where he has come from, he asks Jake how long he proposes to stay. Disappointed by his answer, he tells him, "Longer you couldn't stay. This is Israel, it's a miracle. So, Mr. Herish, what line of business you in?"<sup>18</sup> Not only does the non sequitur of his question detract from the credibility of his emotions about his country, but the term "miracle" seems debased coming from a rich tourist who views Israel not as a homeland, but as a curiosity.

The narrator of The Second Scroll was shaken by profound feelings of cultural and religious ties with the land of his fathers:

My sojourn in Israel was a continual going to and fro, an unremitting excitement. I wanted to take in the whole country, all at once. If a plane had been available I should have loved to have risen in it so that I might look at Dan and Beersheba simultaneously. If I could only stretch out my arms and make them the land's frontiers! For there wasn't a place, disguised though it might be under a letter-day name, that didn't speak to me out of my personal past.<sup>19</sup>

Jake Herish, however, is noticeably lacking in such effusive feelings of patriotism. Brought up in Montreal, living in London, and partly assimilated by the culture of the Gentiles, he finds it difficult to succumb to any feelings of nation-

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<sup>18</sup>

St. Urbain's Horseman, p. 252.

<sup>19</sup>

The Second Scroll, p. 73.

alistic fervor when he reaches the Promised Land: "On arrival, it was balmy, marvelously bright and blue; and what with London's wet gummy skies only six hours behind him, Jake began to feel elated. After all, this was Eretz Yisroel. Zion."<sup>20</sup> If nothing else, Israel's climate is more pleasant than that of England.

One of the reasons for the difference between Richler's and Klein's protagonists' reactions to Israel is that the former does not believe as fervently the traditions and customs of his people. Richler, unlike Klein, cannot impose a religious interpretation upon Israeli history. The contrast in their outlooks is obvious in the two authors' varying treatments of the clergy of their faith. Klein, for example, describes the emotions evoked by the sight of a rabbi and his student in Israel. The two represent a symbol of unchanging purpose and order in an otherwise shifting world:

The young boy, no more than thirteen, holding his heavy tome, the tractate Baba Kama, might have been there as of some remote century, forever unaging in the study of Torah, which is Life; and the old venerable sage, bearded like antiquity, was, as he murmured over his book of piety, a sort of anticipatory figure, an image of the boy an era hence. They seemed, surely, not of this world. . . They affirmed it for me, the young boy prodigy and the old man who looked like Elijah: Israel had not only returned back into Time; it still belonged to Eternity.<sup>21</sup>

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St. Urbain's Horseman, p. 251.

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The Second Scroll, pp. 87-88.

Jake Hersh, on the other hand, expresses a different reaction to the venerable sages he encounters during the shiva (period of mourning the death of a close relative) of his father. The head of the "local yeshiva's Mafia",<sup>22</sup> as Jake terms the rabbis who attend his father's shiva, Rabbi Polsky is depicted as little more than a cunning man who craftily maintains his position as "holy man to the Hershes".<sup>23</sup> Basing his arguments for orthodoxy on the dietary practises described in Time magazine articles, he seems to Jake to encourage a shallow faith when he preaches to the Hershes, "all of whom virtually glowed in his presence".<sup>24</sup> The emptiness of another rabbi's advice to one of Issy Hersh's bereaved relatives not to question the Lord's ways also causes Jake some indignation: "Exactly what Rabbi Meltzer had told the Horseman. Did they subscribe, Jake wondered, to the same chief rabbi of platitudes? Had they been issued with similar condolence kits on graduation from yeshiva?"<sup>25</sup>

Richler's attitude towards rabbis has remained much the same in all of his novels. He had satirized the progressive Rabbi Goldstone in The Apprenticeship, but the orthodox rabbi described in St. Urbain's Horseman receives satiric

<sup>22</sup> St. Urbain's Horseman, p. 393.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 394.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 394.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 390.

treatment as well. Richler is obviously willing to attack both schools. One of the reasons for his distaste is the apparent shallowness of their religious practice. For example, the rabbi who delivers the funeral oration for Wolf Adler in Son of a Smaller Hero is rather heavy-handedly denounced as a man with a dubious type of faith: "Rabbi Milton 'Pinky' Fishman was sincere out of necessity. He believed in God as an insurance salesman believes in Prudential." <sup>26</sup>

Yet Richler's harsh evaluations seem to be based not only on the conviction that the rabbis' faith is shallow, but that they are, in effect, mere instruments of the powers-that-be. The rabbi of the Yemenite shul in "This Year in Jerusalem" is the most extreme example, but the comparisons of Rabbi Fishman to an insurance salesman and Rabbi Polsky to a Mafia chieftain contain similar suggestions. In fact the very similarity of the scenes in Son of a Smaller Hero and St. Urbain's Horseman in which the respective rabbis seem no more than servants to the complacent families which the rebellious protagonists have fled suggests that Richler's conviction is long-held. What seems to disgruntle him is the rabbis' virtual pandering to the established families, as in St. Urbain's Horseman:

Furthermore, God was interested in the fate of the Hershes, with time and consideration for each one. To

pray was to be heard. There was not even death, only an interlude below ground. For one day, as Rabbi Folsky assured them, the Messiah would blow his horn, they would rise as one and return to Zion. Buried with twigs in their coffins, as Baruch had once said, to dig their way to him before the neighbors.<sup>27</sup>

Just as Klein's belief in the possibility of a unified Jewish community appears in his respect for its religious heads, his outrage at those who violate his people again implies a sense of community. He had denounced the Nazi leader for his sins in his satiric work The Hitleriad: "The Madmen named the Lord his personal foe./ And chained the bearers of His sacred word."<sup>28</sup> A rather more successful denunciation is contained in Melech's letter, "Gloss Gimel" of The Second Scroll, which condemns the genocide perpetrated upon the Jews during the Second World War:

It is murder of the codes to snap the thread of a man's life. Such homicide the sons of Belial committed in thousands of thousands, a thousand thousand for each day of the six days of creation. Alas, alas for their victims, and alas for them, that their crime did not end with this slaughter but is forever repeated and multiplied: as the constellations move in their courses and the years and decades pass and the generations that should have been born are not born, the hand that slew is seen again to be slaying, and again, and again; frustrate generation after frustrate generation, to all time, eternal murder, murder immortal! . . . Yet so it is; the deed is named: the hand of the Lord is lifted, beckoning levitation, and what horror shall be affixed to the hand that slaps His down?<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> St. Urbain's Horseman, pp. 396-397.

<sup>28</sup> The Hitleriad, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> The Second Scroll, pp. 109-110.



Noah Adler of Richler's Son of a Smaller Hero could not feel the anguishes of his people because he lacked the sense of community necessary to consider his people's suffering a personal wound. Similarly, Jake Hersh feels the difficulty of reacting to the Jews' anguishes. Jake is not entirely unmindful of German war atrocities; indeed, one of his favorite fantasies is that of the Horseman avenging the Jews upon the war criminal Mengele. Nevertheless, when he visits Germany, he cannot feel the same righteous wrath that Klein exhibits against the anti-Christ. Wandering through the streets of Munich, Jake amazes himself by not feeling indignation:

You're in Gehenna, Jake. The lowest regions. Shouldn't he raise fires? Shout at passersby? Murderers, murderers. But he continued to walk... Once he bumped into a middle-aged lady wrapped in a silver fox and hastily said, "Entschuldig mir," hoping she would take it for German, not Yiddish, instead of following through with his shoulder and stamping on her. Hatred was a discipline. He would have to train harder, that's all.<sup>30</sup>

Jake finds celebrating Israel's victory in the Six-Day War as difficult as bemoaning his people's suffering. Torn between his status as an assimilated liberal and his Jewish identity, he cannot feel elated just as he cannot feel depressed. Richler describes Jake's embarrassment at his vicarious share in the Israeli victory when his associates hear of it:

The Egyptian air force was destroyed on the ground; Jordan undone. Well-meaning acquaintances bought Jake

drinks in the bar at Pinewood Studios.

"You've got to hand it to the Israelis," somebody said. "Bloody good show," another man cut in, slapping him on the back.<sup>31</sup>

Wondering how he himself should react, Jake remembers the men he met in Israel, the tourist Cooper and the officer who has become one of Dayan's lieutenants:

Jake had never seen Elan again after the day at Beer-sheba. Neither had he ever run into the Coopers elsewhere. Elan, Jake assumed, had fought bravely, leading his men, not following after. And wherever he was today Mr. Cooper had, Jake felt sure, given generously to support the Israeli war effort. So would all the Coopers everywhere. 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>32</sup>

Richler, however, does not intend Jake to be considered as a guilty little man who offers money to salve his conscience. Unlike the Diaspora Jew Cooper, he cannot ease his anxieties and bolster his ego by donating to a war fund. Similarly, he cannot admire the nationalistic Elan he had met in Israel before the war. Elan, incidentally, recalls the cowards who allowed the govim to define them, depicted in Richler's earlier novels. However, his provincialism has progressed a step further. Where the clannish Jews of

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<sup>31</sup>

Ibid., p. 385.

<sup>32</sup>

Ibid.

Richler's earlier novels defined themselves in opposition to the Gentiles, Elan's clannishness is so extreme that he looks condescendingly on the Jews living outside of Israel. Thus, he seems no more than an elitist willing to ignore his countrymen's faults while scorning the same faults in the "foreign" Jews who visit their homeland.

Jake, not possessed of the simple mentality of a Cooper or an Elan who can readily perceive the distinctions between the Chosen People and the goyim, is disturbed by another consideration as well. The Israel he had visited before the war had depressed him with its materialism and vulgarity. Ironically, it was Elan, destined to become one of the reborn state's champions, who had rebuked him: "You're the fastidious one, aren't you, Herish? You wonder why we have vulgar hotels and would finance exploitation films to be made by second-rate people. It's because we need the currency. We need it to survive."<sup>33</sup>

Richler has described the harmful side-effects of this dependence on the dollar in his essay "This Year in Jerusalem". The novel, again, stresses the objectionable degradation of a potentially noble country. For example, where Klein had only Beersheba's heat and flies to object to, Richler laments the portents of progress at the same site:

Finally, the station wagon rocked to a stop on the outskirts of Beersheba. Squinting against the wind-blown sand, Jake saw an enormous roadhouse rising

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

abruptly out of the desert. The proprietor, a Mr. Hod, hurried toward them. "I'm putting up the finest hotel in Israel," he said. "We're going to have a golf course, hot springs -- the works. Soon we'll have the biggest neon sign in the country. The Arabian Nights Hotel. I'm even organizing a society to be called Sons of the Arabian Nights."<sup>34</sup>

Klein, in his enthusiasm at the establishment of the state of Israel, has a vision of a reunited and reborn community. For example, the congregation gathered at the funeral of Uncle Melech at the conclusion of the novel symbolises hope for the narrator; instead of dwelling on Melech's death, he emphasizes the potentiality of rebirth: "it was as if the tribes of Israel had come to life again and were travelling as in olden times. . . here in Israel these were not really tombs but antechambers to new life, the mise-en-scène for an awakening."<sup>35</sup> Klein's vision is such that the reborn state is considered to be the fulfilment of a covenant. As M. W. Steinberg points out in his introduction to the novel, "The Second Scroll is concerned fundamentally with religious themes, in that contemporary Jewish history is interpreted in terms of religion as the coming together again of God, the Jewish people, and the Holy Land. The events, seen as miraculous, reveal the involvement of God's will."<sup>36</sup> Richler,

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<sup>34</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>

The Second Scroll, p. 92.

<sup>36</sup>

Introduction, p. xv.

witnessing a similar rebirth a couple of decades later, sees no such divine involvement in Jewish affairs. If anything, he appears to dismiss such beliefs as somewhat naive. In a description of Jake's uncles who implicitly believe in Divine Providence's intervention in contemporary Jewish history, Richler implies that their opinions are a trifle childish:

Only Uncle Sam was not surprised by the Israeli victory. He reminded everybody that it was the Jews who had turned the tide against the Nazis in World War II. At Tobruk.

"They stood against five Arab nations," Uncle Abe said again and again, "all alone. It has to be the fulfillment of divine intervention, even the most skeptical man must accept it was God's fulfillment to Abraham. . . .<sup>37</sup>

This is not meant to suggest that Richler, unlike Klein, is contemptuous of his people and their beliefs. Richler has protested, in the introduction to the collection of essays Hunting Tigers Under Glass, that he is not a "Jew-baiter".<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, "a certain scepticism", as well as "a tendency to deflate", which he describes as the unifying tone of the collection, cause him to deride "a not uncommon Israeli arrogance"<sup>39</sup> which he perceived during his visit to Israel. This arrogance has been an object of his satire not

<sup>37</sup> St. Urbain's Horseman, p. 401.

<sup>38</sup> Hunting Tigers Under Glass, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

only in the essay "This Year in Jerusalem", but in his treatments of the Jewish characters portrayed in his earlier novels. Richler's vision, however, is characterised by more than the satirical purpose, the "tendency to deflate", for besides focussing on the faults and excesses of his people, he implies that the Jewish community and the ghetto produce petty men. The character of Duddy Kravitz in The Apprenticeship, for instance, suggests the harmful effects of remaining within the ghetto. In St. Urbain's Horseman, similarly, Jake Hersh is repelled by Irwin, the end-product of the ghetto ruled over by Uncle Abe: "My grandfather didn't come here steerage, Baruch didn't die in penury, Joey wasn't driven out of town, so that this jelly, this nose-picker, this sports nut, this lump of shit, your son, should inherit the earth."<sup>40</sup>

Jake chooses instead to idolize the rebellious Cousin Joey, the Horseman. A comparison of Jake's relation to the Horseman and the narrator's relation to Uncle Melech in The Second Scroll would provide some indication of the varying sensibilities of Richler and Klein.

Jake Hersh's original infatuation with the Horseman is prompted largely by his admiration of Cousin Joey's glamorous freedom from the restrictions of the ghetto. Joey, after having left Montreal as a youth, returns a

changed man:

The day Joey returned his fire-engine red MG looked so lithe and incongruous parked right there on St. Urbain, among the fathers' battered Chevies and coal delivery trucks, off-duty taxis, salesmen's Fords and grocery goods vans -- the MG could have been a magnificent stallion and Cousin Joey a knight returned from a foreign crusade.<sup>41</sup>

After a brief sojourn in Montreal, Cousin Joey again mysteriously departs, and Jake, in spite of his quest for him in Israel and Germany, never sees him again.

In Joey's absence, basing his conclusions on facts that trickle down to him, Jake begins mythologizing the Horseman, considering him a mighty warrior and avenger who stalked war criminals in South America and fought in the International Brigade in Spain and in Israel during the War of Independence. A large part of this hero-worship is caused by Jake's instinctive identification with the figure of the arch-rebel, who successfully fled the ghetto to establish himself in the gentile world. As Jake tells Uncle Abe, the virtual head of the Hersch family: "Don't claim me, please. At least not in that fashion. Because as amusing as you are, and plausible, the Hersch family honor rides on Joey's back, not on your complacent shoulders, and my heart belongs to him."<sup>42</sup>

Another, more significant reason for his idolising

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<sup>41</sup>

Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>42</sup>

Ibid., pp. 409-410.

the Horseman is his need for a morally inspiring figure, a guiding force during a time when moral absolutes and codes of conduct are apparently non-existent: "Oh Horseman, Horsemen, where are you? Jake craved answers, a revelation, something out there, a certitude, like the Bomb before it was discovered."<sup>43</sup> Thus Jake creates an image of Joey that is implausible, a larger-than-life hero figure. Choosing to ignore the suggestions that Joey might be a blackmailer and a gigolo, that, indeed, his death was caused by a plane crash during a smuggling mission, Jake views Cousin Joey as the mythical Horseman, a hero that at times seems to be taken from the comic strips, a "Jewish Batman".<sup>44</sup>

Richler, however, suggests that Jake's idealised vision of the Horseman is a necessary moral support, a "conscience", a "mentor".<sup>45</sup> This implication is contained in the poem from Auden which Richler quotes as the epigraph to St. Urbain's Horseman:

Defenceless under the night  
Our world in a stupor lies;  
Yet, dotted everywhere,  
Ironie points of light  
Flash out wherever the Just  
Exchange their messages:  
May I, composed like them  
Of Eros and of dust,

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<sup>43</sup>

Ibid., pp. 302-303.

<sup>44</sup>

Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>45</sup>

Ibid., p. 464.



Beleaguered by the same  
Negation and despair,  
Show an affirming flame.

The mythical Horseman, the idealised Cousin Joey, seems just such an "ironic point of light" to Jake, beleaguered as he is by the "negation and despair" of the world. For Cousin Joey is resurrected at the novel's conclusion only when Jake rationalizes his need for him. The Horseman, finally, is viewed by Jake not as the magnificent rebel, but as the inspiring "moral editor"<sup>46</sup> that motivates his actions.

Where Cousin Joey first inspires Jake Herish because of his rebelliousness, the narrator of The Second Scroll sets out in search of the uncle who first encouraged him in his orthodoxy: "Was he not, in a sense, responsible for my pilgrimage? Had it not been his name that had encouraged me forward from the first twisted sleph of my schoolbook to the latest neologisms of Hebrew poetry?"<sup>47</sup> Thus the hero-figures in St. Urbain's Horseman and in The Second Scroll are virtually polar opposites.

The differences between the symbolic functions of the hero-figures of the two novels is implied in the authors' use of a similar image for varying purposes. Uncle Melech of The Second Scroll is described as "a kind of mirror, an

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<sup>46</sup>

Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>47</sup>

The Second Scroll, p. 40.

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aspaklaris of the events of our time". In other words, Melech's ordeals and wanderings symbolize the plight of the Jews of his generation. His flirting with Marxism and Catholicism, and his eventual return to orthodoxy cause him to be transformed into the archetype of his people, or what Steinberg terms "the Jew in exile".<sup>49</sup> His path is retraced by his nephew the poet, who, in a moment of epiphany, mythologizes his career, announcing the hero to the world.

Cousin Joey of St. Urbain's Horseman is a hero of a different sort. The mirror image is used by Richler as well to describe his career: "What if the Horseman was a distorting mirror and we each took the self-justifying image we required of him?"<sup>50</sup> Thus, Jake considers the Horseman an almost mythical hero, while his Uncle Abe views him as a blackmailer and a gigolo. The ambiguity of the hero-figure in Richler's novel is partly explained by the implication that Richler's generation, unlike Klein's, cannot be considered to fit the heroic mold: "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>51</sup> Klein can mythologize Uncle Melech because he

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Ibid., p. 92.

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Introduction, p. x.

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St. Urbain's Horseman, p. 464.

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Ibid., p. 308.

survived the sufferings of the Jews during the two World Wars. Richler's generation, however, may no longer have heroes of the same stature because the time of heroic action is past.

Another reason for the differences between the two hero-figures is the fact that Klein is of a tradition and of a community in which the moral absolutes are clearly defined, while Richler is writing at a time when the values have become personal rather than communal. Klein, for example, writing within a definite religious tradition, can depict, as in "Psalm I" of Poems, clear distinctions between the "holy ones", the Israelites, and the "painted heathen". Richler, on the other hand, can sympathetically describe a "villain" -- the German Ernst of A Choice of Enemies. In The Second Scroll there are clearly defined good systems of conduct -- orthodoxy -- just as there are evil philosophies -- materialism and Bolshevism. Richler, however, has expressed the opinion that such ideological absolutes no longer exist. In an interview with Nathan Cohen, granted at the time when he was writing his third novel, A Choice of Enemies, Richler stated:

I think what is emerging from this breakdown [of values] is a much more complicated and closely held personal standard of values. Even in small things. I think we are coming back to a very personal and basic set of values because the exterior values have failed. There has been a collapse of absolute values, whether that value was God or Marx or gold. We are

living at a time when superficially life seems meaningless, and we have to make value judgements all the time, it seems in relation to nothing.<sup>52</sup>

What Richler is implying is that orthodoxy (God), Bolshevism (Marx), and materialism (gold), the three absolute systems of conduct treated by Klein in The Second Scroll, are no longer tenable.

Thus, Richler's vision might be termed an inversion, a mirror-image, of that expressed by Klein in The Second Scroll. Where Klein's work celebrates the community, the final reunion of the exiled Israelites, Richler, as has been pointed out, portrays in "This Year in Jerusalem" and in St. Urbain's Horseman an uneasy alliance among individuals or small groups motivated by differing ideologies and beliefs in spite of their common race and heritage. This tendency is obvious in Richler's earlier novels as well. In Son of a Smaller Hero, for example, the Jewish community is depicted as an anachronistic ghetto which is breaking up in spite of the older Jews' efforts to preserve it. In fact, Richler implies in his novels about Jewish life that the ghetto is an inhibiting prison which one is almost morally obliged to flee.

The heads of the communities are also treated differently in Klein's and Richler's works. After the doubts and despair voiced by Klein in his earlier poems, he joyfully

announces the coming of the Messiah in The Second Scroll. As Steinberg suggests, "Uncle Melech seems to act in a dual symbolic capacity suggesting to the reader both the Jewish people and the Messiah. . . Uncle Melech's name clearly establishes his Messianic role: Melech (King) Davidson (David's son) is none other than Messiah, who is commonly referred to as Messiah ben David (David's son) or simply as 'Son of David'."<sup>53</sup> Richler's kings have a decidedly more threatening aspect. The movie magnate Star Maker of Cocksure and the millionaire Buck Twentyman of The Incomparable Atuk, for example, seem to be modern manifestations of the anti-Christ. The "ageless, undying Star Maker",<sup>54</sup> who is both worshipped and feared by his employees (Blessed Be His Name<sup>55</sup>), tells Mortimer Griffin, the protagonist of the novel, of his plans for a child: "Since God, the first self-contained creator. . . I am now able to reproduce myself. I will have a son."<sup>56</sup> In the novels dealing with Jewish life the true leaders of the communities are not the patriarchs or the rabbis, but those with wealth and power. In Son of a Smaller Hero, for example, Uncle Max's wealth and political interests are major reasons for the transformation of a cowardly

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<sup>53</sup> Introduction, p. xii.

<sup>54</sup> Mordecai Richler, Cocksure (2nd ed.; New York: Bantam Books, 1969), p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

little man into a latter-day saint. Thus, while Klein perceives a Messiah returned to his people, Richler envisions either a demonic tyrant or an ineffectual patriarch as the head of the community.

Klein's protagonist in The Second Scroll rejected the "materialist interpretation of history"<sup>57</sup> advanced by the diabolical Settano, just as he later mocked the "materialist benefactors", the rich tourists visiting Israel. Richler, on the other hand, depicts a world in which materialism has become a way of life, even in the Promised Land. In St. Urbain's Horseman, for example, he describes an accountant's office as the modern equivalent of a place of worship. As a result, the relations between the rich and their accountants become a parody of those between the faithful and their ministers:

lately an ominous cloud had gathered over the once blessed spires of Oscar Hoffman & Co., Accountants. Increasingly the angel fallen from Inland Revenue contemplated the sacrifices on the altar and pronounced them lacking in sufficient faith, for his Chancellor was a jealous one and would tolerate no other heavens before him.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, while Klein envisioned a New Jerusalem arising out of the ashes of Sodom, Richler's fictional city has remained much the same throughout his work. From the Montreal dominated by the millionaire Calder living at the top of

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<sup>57</sup> The Second Scroll, p. 46.

<sup>58</sup> St. Urbain's Horseman, p. 222.

Westmount mountain in The Apprenticeship, to the Jerusalem where an Israeli proudly claims that the Jews have sacrificed their souls, Richler's fictional city might be termed a Sodom on the verge of destroying itself.

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