

The Predicament of the Jewish Women

The position of women in traditional Judaism is not nearly as lowly as many modern people think. In fact, the position of women in Jewish law that dates back to the biblical period is in many ways better than the position of women under American civil law as recently as a century ago. Jewish women had the right to buy, sell and own property and make their own contracts—rights which women in western countries did not have until about hundred years ago. In fact, Proverbs (31:10-31), which is read at Jewish Weddings, speak repeatedly of business acumen as a trait to be prized in Women. They had the right to be consulted with regard to their marriage. Marital sex is regarded as the woman's right, and not the man's. Men do not have the right to beat or mistreat their wives, a right that was recognized by law in many western countries only a few hundred years ago. Traditional Judaism did not permit the forced sexual relation even within the context of marriage. The respect accorded to women in Jewish tradition was a part of their ethnic culture. The women are for the most part seen as separate but equal. Their obligations and responsibilities are different from men's, but no less important. In fact in some ways, women's responsibilities are considered more important.

The equality of men and women begins at the highest possible level: God. According to most Jewish scholars, man was created with dual gender (Gen.1:27) and was later separated into male and female. Traditional Judaism views that women are endowed with a greater degree of *binah* (intuition, understanding, intelligence) than men. The rabbis inferred this from the fact that woman was “built” (Gen 2:22) rather than “formed” (Gen 2:7). Women have held positions of respect in Judaism since biblical times. There were many learned women of note. The Talmud and later rabbinical writings speak of the wisdom of Berurya, the wife of Rabbi Meir. In several instances, her opinions on Jewish law were accepted over those of her male contemporaries.

But later, women were discouraged from pursuing higher education, religious pursuits or public life. This seems to be primarily because women who engage in such pursuits might neglect their primary duties as wives and mothers. The rabbis were not concerned that women are not spiritual enough; rather they were concerned that women might become too spiritually devoted. Women, in Judaism, are exempted from all positive commandments (“thou shall”) because her duties as a wife and mother are so important that they can not be postponed to fulfill a commandment. It is this exemption from certain commandments that has led to the greatest misunderstanding of the role of women in Judaism.

The exemption was misinterpreted as prohibition. This misconception derives from the mistaken assumption that Jewish religious life revolves around the synagogue. It actually revolves around the home, where the woman's role is every bit as important as the man's.

But the nineteenth century saw the beginning of a major revision in thinking about women and sex, a process in which literature played an important part. Novelists in particular were moving towards new and radical images of women. The "Woman question" had arrived in earnest and the vague but popular phrase "the new woman" was coined in an effort to describe women who had either won or were fighting for a degree of equality. It is tempting to believe that these changes came directly out of the feminist movement.

Traditionally, women, irrespective of religion and race, have inhabited private spaces which are simultaneously protected and claustrophobic, because public space is defined as male. Women were often seen either as interlopers or as 'fair Sex' undeserving of respect or safety. They were viewed as the preserves of tradition. Frequently a woman who left the sanctity of the home was automatically defined as disrespectable or dangerous. After the World War I, the female role was undergoing a transformation from passive, private creature to an individual of new experiences.

An analysis of Richler's works reveals that the major output centers on the studies of his heroes. For, it is one of Richler's styles that the women in his novels appear for the most part simply as adjuncts of men, significant only in the context of men's activities. This style sets the pattern in the treatment of his women characters in all the novels. His style, to put in Lukacs terms, is not just the "stylistic 'techniques' in the formalistic sense". Lukacs, in "The Ideology of Modernism" observes that, what determines the style of a given work of art is the intention of the author; the intention realized in the work and not the writer's conscious intention. "And it is the writer's attempt to reproduce this view of the world which constitutes his intention and is the formative principle underlying the style of a given piece of writing. Looked at in this way, style ceases to be a formalistic category. Rather, it is rooted in context; it is the specific form of a specific content" ("The Ideology of Modernism"). Richler himself had agreed to his style of writing in his interview with Graeme Gibbon. He said, "well I'm afraid I've never written very well about women. I think my feminine characters tend to be one dimensional. Women in my novels tend to be rather idealized creatures and not written about with the greatest confidence, I'm afraid" (*Eleven Canadian novelists: Interviewed by Graeme Gibbon* 287-88).

Richler's female characters are not marked by a whole-hearted delight in life. Apparently, they cannot be, because as Jewish women they start life with all the cards stacked against them. They are at loose ends with themselves and with the world. Despite the social and economic changes that have improved the status of women, the women in Richler's novels have not achieved equality in education or in the workplace. They are compounded with the stress of being a "homemaker" and "career women". Most of Richler's women live a sad or incomplete personal life. The portrayal of willful and self destructive women like Clara (BV), Ruthy (JTN) and Lucy (SGWH) sends the readers the message that the trauma of the pogroms, Holocaust and wars are equally dominant in Richler's women characters. They are not Rosalinds, Violas or Beatrices whose love is gay but whose gaiety conceals the tenderness behind it. They are not intellectual abstractions like some of the creations of Bernard Shaw or Aldous Huxley. They are more or less dumb creatures whom Fate has treated shabbily. The sense of identity and assimilation is present in Richler's conception of women too.

Richler's women characters fall into four groups: Woman as a symbol of Home, Woman as a rebel, Woman as an impediment and Woman as an embittered housewife. Apart from the women who fall into

the above categories, there are many “invisible”, “faceless” and “nameless” characters.

To Jews and Judaism, mothers have always been the foundations of the Jewish home. The Hebrew bible depicts the self-sacrifice of the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel as role models. Motherhood and family are essential components of a Torah life. Over the millennia, Jewish motherhood was given pride of place in all Jewish societies. According to the Jewish law, the decision of whether a child is Jewish or not is based on the religious identity of the mother, not the father. The mother therefore plays a pivotal role in the success of the Jewish family and Jewish mothers have proven to be the key element in the survival of the family despite centuries of great struggle.

In Richler’s novels Jenny Adler (SOSH), Nialie (SGWH), Minnie (ADK), and Miriam Panofsky (BV) symbolize home and even more what it stands for: love, care, affection, understanding, tolerance and self-sacrifice. Jenny Adler, the eldest of the women characters in Richler’s novels, practised the traditional role of a woman as wife, mother and keeper of the household. She enjoyed making raisin buns for her children on Sundays. Her recipe was admired by every one. She had no money or wisdom to offer them. All she knew was to cook for them and comfort them when they are in trouble. She carefully balanced the roles of being a

mother and a wife. Melech, her husband being very stiff, alienated himself from his children. Whereas Jenny, every time they came, went closer to them and acted as a bridge between the children and their father. She blindly defends her children when Melech complains about them. She did not bother much about the problems and saved a dollar from the grocery money every week to pay for a place in the Mount Carmel cemetery. She unburdens her problems on Melech's shoulders thinking Melech knows everything. She is contended with her family and as a personification of love, care and sacrifice no other women characters can outdo Mrs. Jenny.

But Nialie, the wife of Henry Gursky in *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, is not only a loving mother of Issac but also a woman who values her responsibility in bringing up her son, imparting him moral and spiritual wisdom. In spite of moral preachings, Nialie knew Issac was stealing and shop-lifting at Hudson Bay's trading post. She found out the things Issac had hidden in his room. But she procrastinated to complain this to Henry as he is very devoted to his son. He had hopes that Issac will emerge as a rabbi. She strikes a right balance as a mother and wife. Unlike Jenny Adler, she never hesitated to reproach her son for his bad behaviours, and had complete control over the family. After Henry's death, she is

entrusted with his property, for Issac being a minor. She is an independent woman who can shoulder the problems of her husband and the family.

Miriam Panofsky in *Barney's Version* is a beautiful woman with her great capacity for understanding and affection. She is Barney's third wife who captivated him by her intelligence. Yet he loved to live his life as it was, with Miriam, the home maker. Miriam wisely observes Barney; the way he loves his work, the role of work in his life and how much he needs it. So also, Miriam's work as a programmer in CBC is very important to her. This forms the base of tension in her marriage to Barney. She gives up the job for the sake of Barney for she knows how much the family means to her. She accepts Barney with all his short comings. She realizes that it is the job of a woman to guide herself, her husband and family. She is a woman who valued herself and is valued for her irreplaceable contributions to the functioning of home. The other characters lacked the strength and integrity that Miriam possessed.

But even a person like Miriam could not help Barney's self destructive streak. Barney himself says, "I was amazed that a woman as intelligent and beautiful as Miriam would marry somebody like me. And so fearful of losing her, I made her my prisoner, methodically alienating the friends she had made before we met" (BV 348). Miriam did not feel at ease spending her time in home making, wasting her professional talents.

She is of the notion that women who can contribute their professional talents to better the world should be supported, but the importance of a woman's role as wife and mother should not be forgotten. Their children grew up and stayed away from them. So she expressed her desire to take up reporting in CBC-TV again. Barney without respecting her feelings asked, "You're at the CBC all day, what would I do for dinner when I get home?" which leaves Miriam irritated. But whenever she desired to go to work, he will offer her a foreign trip to forget about her work. Barney felt more of a man when he kept Miriam in her traditionally accepted place, namely the home. But he violated their familial ties. Barney did the blunder of sleeping with another woman. He could have never imagined that single lapse would cost him the woman who meant everything to him.

She leaves him assertively telling that she can not put up with him, as her mother was to her father (who was not faithful). Like Ibsen's Nora, Miriam leaves the house, telling, " Barney, I'm weary of pleasing everybody. You. The children. Your friends. You've been making all the decisions for me ever since we married. I'd like to make some decisions of my own, good or bad, before I'm too old" (361).

She is the symbol of Home that she never finds herself a home is her tragedy. She realizes that she is in an unsympathetic alien world of destruction and emotional stress. Miriam, unlike the traditional Jewish

women, is a 'new woman' who can manage responsibilities as a home maker and as a career woman but at the same time never hesitates to break the barriers to assert her individuality and self-respect.

In *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, Duddy is often crudely dismissive of normal human decencies. The various methods he adopt in his pursuit for land is disgusting. Experience does not teach him; it, rather deforms him. When one analyses why experiences deform him or corrupt him, one is hinted as to what's wrong in Duddy. His world is a world of men without women. His world consists of his Zeyda, his father, his brother, his uncle and no mother. Minnie, Duddy's mother is dead. Had his mother been there for Duddy, he would have been a different man; his father, Max Kravitz would not have become a pimp. The family lacks a good dependable woman. According to Richler, only women are able to provide unconditional love and support to a family. Only they can make a home out of a house or out of nothing. This view of women's role as a homemaker is extended to Richler's gentile creations also. Nancy in *St. Urbain's Horseman*, is an obvious example and *Joshua Then and Now* ends with Pauline literally supporting Joshua. In *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, Duddy feels, he lacks his mother's love. He asks his father, "Did she ... well, like me?" (ADK 189). Perhaps his mother may have valued him for what he is. He had associated his mother with

tenderness, 'a soft touch'. For Duddy, the need to touch has something to do with the loss of his mother. Once, Duddy embarrasses Lennie by embracing him. He wakes him in the middle of the night to ask him if their mother liked him. The unresponsive world outside and the lack of love freezes Duddy from inside—proves that the role of a woman in a family can not be substituted.

The 'new woman's' radical challenge to the traditional social structure is seen in many of Richler's female characters. Ida Blumberg (TA) and Ruthy (ICA) are the Jewish women who wanted to break free the shackles of ghetto. Ida, the daughter of Polish immigrants, a Jewish working-class girl rebelled against all middle class conventions. When she did her university education, she was in the process of escaping from a very restricted home. She was the president of the 'Skeptics Club'. She used to write neurotic letters to the college paper saying that Hitler hadn't killed off the Jews fast enough. She went to the extent of suggesting dropping atom bombs on India and China to settle down population problem. Most of the students were afraid of her. She showed up in black face when the communists of the campus invited her to introduce a Negro unionist to speak at one of their students' meeting. She insisted Andre to do a pornographic painting for her. Every one in the campus knew she

was a Jewess and notorious. So did Andre. But Andre was attracted to her. She was very pretty at the same time foolish and eccentric at times.

She refused Andre's offer to marry her even when she was pregnant. He expected her to get delighted. He felt it would be a sensation to marry a Jewess. But she insisted on abortion, telling Andre that her parents would die of grief. The irony is, Ida died in the abortion leaving Andre with a terrible burden of guilt. Both of them had used each other to give a cultural shock to their respective societies. Ida can be seen as a rebel who wanted to break the barriers of her closed society only for her immature, unclear and selfish motives. She is a confused rebel whose rebellion did not bring any effect on her own life or her society.

The relationship of Andre and Ida prefigures another relationship between a Jewish woman and a gentile in *The Incomparable Atuk*. Ruthy and Bones become inseparable couple in the university campus and got married the day after graduation. Ruthy, like Ida rebelled against her culture and tradition. She wished to give her family a final slap in the face by marrying Bones. Her friends even predicted that she, as a Jewess, would end up getting married only to a dentist. She also wanted to prove to her skeptical friends that she is not ghetto-bounded.

Unlike Ida, she knew what she wanted from her life. She married Bones because “being a Goy, he couldn’t be as smart as she was. She could direct and control him” (ICA 61). Also, unlike other ghetto women, who cared very little for their sexual life, Ruthy was free of sexual repressions. Ruthy was looking forward to share her bed “with a bullish goy, a brute, a destroyer, a rape artist, instead of an inhibited good-Jewish boy” (ICA 61). But to her disappointment, she found that Bones was a “Once-a-week rabbit”. So to gratify her sexual urge, she shares her bed with Jersey Joe, a huge built African. When she falls pregnant, she baffles Bones by telling that ‘their’ baby could be brown because one side of her family is of Yemenite extraction. Actually Bones married Ruthy thinking that “. . . being a Jewess, she would be forever in his debt. She could never be unfaithful. On the contrary, she would be respectful, grateful” (ICA 61). Ironically, there is no long loyalty or trust between them. They however are incapable of seeing that their exploitative relationship has distorted their perception of each other’s heritage.

Like Ruthy, Anita Gursky and Lucy Gursky in *Solomon Gursky Was Here* are also seen as Jewish women who did not abide by the norms of their tradition-bound society. But the case of Anita and Lucy is different from that of Ruthy’s. Anita, the daughter of Bernard Gursky, the uncrowned king of Gursky Empire, buys a new husband once a year.

Being the daughter of a filthily rich Bernard, she throws money to buy men, as husbands. Yet, not satisfied with her relationships. Bernard feels bad about it but finds no time for Anita, as he values dollar more than his daughter.

Similarly, Lucy, the daughter of Solomon Gursky, craves for attention and thus becomes an actress. The negligence of her father towards the family and her solitary life affects her psyche and she lives on the verge of eccentricity. Though she is not very appealing as the other actresses, Lucy, with all her money, humiliates herself by clutching her portfolio of photographs for some ordinary man to call her name for selection. Using her craze for acting, she was tossed a misleading bone from time to time, sufficient to inflame her fantasies of stardom. She used men, and men used her money. She was only two years old when her father died. Her mother was already a neurotic and her brother Henry abandoned the family for settling down in Yellowknife. Left with huge wealth and money, Lucy turned to pamper herself. She even posed for nude photographs in her venture to become an actress. Not knowing where to ventilate her frustrations she turned to men. Her unconventionality is thus of a mythical Circe, who turns men in to swine. She does just what she wants to and probably it is just this illusion of

confident cheer and security that attracted men of the celluloid world to her. In short, her life is an “existence without quality” (Musil).

Jenny, in *St. Urbain's Horseman* is in a way opposite to Lucy. She takes care of her family after her father, and her brother, the Horseman deserted their family. She was a different girl in St. Urbain's street even when she grew up. She was admired by all the boys of St. Urbain. Some girls lost their boy friends to Jenny. She read Keats, the *Saturday Review of Literature*, Emily Dickinson, Kenneth Putchen. As she grew up, she made all attempts to move away from St. Urbain's to Toronto—an escape from the ghetto, typical of the second generation of Jews in Canada. She did not observe *Sabbath* or any of the religious or cultural observances. She had an inability to adjust to the codes of her society. She goes out for date with St. Urbain boys. She equips herself with skills that'll put her in a job that would support her family, so that uncle Abe's support will no longer be needed. Jenny entered into a calculated marriage with Doug Fraser, a gentile radio writer in Toronto. She married Doug Fraser, for she wanted to show the Jewish community in St. Urbain's that she is no average Jewess. Moreover, she used Fraser as a way to become a reigning hostess for Toronto writers, artists, directors and producers. Much of her success as hostess consisted of her willingness to go to bed with whomsoever.

Esther Shapiro (JTN), Mrs. Panofsky and Clara (BV) are in a way portrayed as eccentric women whom the husbands were not able to handle. Esther, a very sensual and determined woman is the mother of the protagonist in the novel. Married to Reuben, Esther initially was an ideal house wife. She loved him so much that she never sends his white shirts to the laundry but ironed them herself.

Esther was not like the other Jewish women on the street. She was uncommonly beautiful, with thick black hair, thin waist line, a high girlish bosom, delicate white skin and a sweet laugh. She was quite indifferent to Joshua's report cards and didn't care how late he came from school. She was totally unconcerned about his prospects. Rather she plays her gramophone and practice tap dancing. Reuben's frequent extended absences intensified Ester's feeling of loneliness. On seeing Reuben close to Joshua, she resented that the child kept her from the husband with whom she was still much infatuated. Another act of her abnormality was displayed in Joshua's *bar-mitzvah*. She treated her son with a memorable '*Bar-mitzvah*' by ceremoniously performing a strip-tease—an explicit satire of the Jewish tradition. “She strips away the conventional decency which is highly practiced and preserved by the Jewish mothers” (*Discursive Displacement* 63). Reuben's long absences and Esther's unreciprocated love made her turn to other men and slowly away from the

family. She once tells Joshua, that Reuben was addicted to prostitutes; he had murdered a man and he was a poor lover and that she was left with all responsibilities for Joshua as a child. But the fact is that she never bothered to take care of Joshua. She made him wait out of the house while engaging her boyfriend inside the house.

Her frustration that she could not run a happy family, like other women, drives her almost neurotic. She can be best fixed in Robert Musil's remark on psychopathology that "either one must run with the pack (When in Rome, do as Romans do); or one becomes a neurotic" (Lukacs). Having come from a cultivated family and married to a club fighter for six years, it was clear that she was still smitten with him. She leaves Reuben to star in pornographic movies and to run a massage parlour. When other Jewish mothers of her age were running shows for charity, she was up there in the big screen running pornographic show with men half her age. She later becomes active in women's liberation; not only that, she was also on the executive board of parents of gays in Canada.

Like Esther Shapiro, Mrs. Panofsky (Barney's mother) in *Barney's Version* is not a legendary Jewish mother. She did not wait by the door for her son to come home from the school. While the other mothers wait with eatables, Barney's mother sat by the radio listening to the programs and she would speak only during the commercial break. She was crazy about

the Hollywood stars and reads Photoplay, Silver Screen and similar other magazines. She neither taught him nor insisted him to study. The kids on the street envied Barney because his mother did not care where he went and when he returned. She was a character who lived in her own dream world uncaring the family.

Another abnormal character in *Barney's Version* is Clara. Barney's first wife and his cohort in his Parisian adventure, Clara, is a neurotic artist who ends up a martyred feminist icon. Clara, born to Jewish parents felt ashamed of being Jewish. She acts hysterical asking her parents who her real parents are. She refused to eat, bit people, used abusive language; a compulsive liar with suicidal tendencies, "going out on the street dressed like a whore". She shocked the Jewish families in the street with her eccentric behaviours. Hiding all these facts, she got married to Barney. Developing an obsessive compulsion for lies and sex, she shared her bed with almost all of Barney's friends and acquaintances. She finally commits suicide, after a break in her relationship with Barney. Her tragedy lies in her failure to remain encompassed within a predefined mode of existence.

Almost all the above mentioned Jewish women are single and rejected the traditional feminine ideas of purity, piety and submission. They drink a lot and one can find them with male company always. There

is no comfort, love and peace one can expect from these women as one expects from a traditional woman. All they could give is disgust, frustration and self-destruction. Though these rebels in Richler's novels are not specified alarm for a sexual revolution, Richler certainly recognizes the changing female roles.

There is a need to examine Richler's female characters in the light of embittered housewives because some husbands of the Jewish women in the novels do not have human consideration towards their wives. Though the Jewish marriage gives equal status to woman in the family, the Jewish women were treated only less than equals in the male-dominated family and society. Some such frustrated housewives in Richler's novels seem to meekly submit themselves to the Fate not knowing the way out of it.

The husbands of Mrs.Hersh and Hannah, in *St. Urbain's Horseman*, desert their families. Mr.Hersh, the mother of the protagonist lives alone with her children in St.Urbain's street. Her husband had divorced her when the children were young. He left her for another woman. Mrs.Hersh had to seek the support of her husband's brothers to help her in running the family. Similarly, Hannah, the Horseman's mother is left alone with three children. Her husband Baruch, even when he lived with her, would not come home for days together. If at all he comes, he

would come home with bottles and ruffians and Hannah had to spend time in kitchen cooking for them till midnight. Baruch would put cigar in his six year old son's mouth and light it driving Hannah screaming.

She is quite a vibrant character though she appears only in a few scenes in the novel. Her earthiness and honesty was not valued by her husband. A blindly devoted and a sacrificial mother, she was treated with indifference even by her son. The first half of her life was spent in search of her husband and the second half in search of her son. She had managed to live with disappointment and frustration. As an uneducated Jewish woman, she confined herself to home and kitchen whose ignorance and innocence was used by her husband only to exploit her.

Leah Adler, the daughter of a *Zaddik* and wife of Wolf Adler, endures a bitterly unhappy marriage to a man who is, she believes, her social and intellectual inferior. She reads Byron, Keats and Scott. Early in the novel, she insists to Wolf that he is "common", whereas she is "a lady". He is not an emotional and aesthetic partner to her. In fact, Wolf was scarred of her brought up. She had no regard for Wolf, for he is a failure in his business; not able to set a business of his own. Frustrated Leah could not come out of the relationship because of the respect she had for her father. Yet, when Wolf dies a 'public hero', apparently trying to rescue a copy of the Torah from the fire, Leah embraces in Wolf's death

the man and the marriage that she could not endure in life. She also sets out to cast Noah, her son, in a new unlikely role. Leah, unlike Hannah (SUHM) is a proud, demanding woman who nearly suffocates her son with her possessiveness, until finally his lover Miriam, sets him free. Leah is in a way, a domineering Jewish mother who wanted to keep Noah under control shifting her dreams from Wolf to Noah. She is proven a failure again because Noah leaves for England, despite Leah's threat of imminent death. She tells Noah, "I'm not going to be used all my life. I've made too many sacrifices already" (SOSH 92). She makes it clear that she needs an emotional security from Noah which lacked in her husband.

Ida Kravitz in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* is another embittered woman, whose life with Benjy disintegrated because of the childless state of her marriage. She severed her ties with Benjy not for anything but for the unhappy married life—a life without a child. Unlike other frustrated wives she did not suffer the family life submitting her self to the fate. She could make the decision of quitting the married life because she was economically independent; and only on her support Benjy was running his business.

In *Solomon Gursky Was Here* the case of Bessie and her husband Lionel Berger is different. They both are not happy or satisfied with each other. Lionel as a writer expected an intellectual companionship from his

wife. He tells her son, "what a man like me needed was refinement, intellectual companionship like Chopin got from Georgas Sand or Voltaire from the Marquise de Chantelit" (133). Bessie, having come from an observant family, confines her role only to family. Lionel never brought her flowers or took her out to dinner. He never told her that she looked nice. Thus Bessie becomes the target of his bitterness and frustration and the scapegoat for his artistic failure. But he was never unfaithful to her like Baruch and Hersh. Bessie and Berger got a long with each other because Lionel Berger respected the institution called Marriage; and Bessie, though neglected and teased for being a simpleton not only tolerates her husband but also philosophises her predicament that life is not what one expects to be.

Clara, the wife of Solomon in *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, is literally driven mad because of the failure of 'love' in their family life. Clara, the beautiful and well disciplined daughter of a rich man in the town was tricked into an affair with Solomon. Solomon who had no strict morals regarding his love life wanted to quit Clara, after using her thoroughly. But he had to agree to the marriage when Clara became pregnant. When she miscarried he took it as license to come home only when it suited him. Later, she came to know of Solomon affair with many women. She could not come out of this life because, one, she thought that her life was her

choice. Two, she had children and three, breaking the familial ties was quite uncommon in those days. But finding her life void of love, respect, care and dignity, she fell into depression that she was not even able to take care of her children. Clara's mental dereliction, to put in Musil's terms, is an "escape" and a sign of "protest against the evils of society". But when Solomon died in the accident, she accused Bernard for murdering him; she refused to accept the help Bernard extended to the family. Had Solomon's soul been wandering somewhere in the house, it would have felt ashamed for the loyalty that Clara showed even after his death. One can see the 'active passivity' in the existence of these female characters, whose tradition and convention had made them to submit their lives at the hands of Fate.

Some of Richler's men find woman as a clog in their way of doing one's duty. Joey, is a sleazy hero who seeks revenge for Dr.Mengele's monstrous treatment of Jewish women. In the process, he himself mistreats women and plays the petty cheat in every town he stays. He thinks that either women or a family of his own will stand as an impediment in the path of the ideological fight he believes in. Joey, the Horseman, having seduced and swindled Ruthy in London, rides off with her money. Later, he mothered Chava in Israel. Left her stranded with a

son, Zev, he is again on the run. To Joey, a family is a binding factor that a man should shed if he has to succeed in his duty.

Noah is another young hero, who is torn between the woman he loves and his duties to his family. His mother's unhappy marriage led her to cling all the more strongly to Noah. He is burdened with the responsibilities of taking care of his mother and also fulfilling the expectations of his lover, Miriam. Initially he was a passionate lover of Miriam. Miriam Hall, wife of Prof. Theo Hall is dissatisfied with her not-so-satisfactory husband. When Noah first went to live with the Halls, he would think of nothing but Miriam. He would steal a glance at her whenever possible. He longed to be with her. She also felt herself drawn to him all the same. They became close and she left the security provided by her husband and the status of being Mrs. Hall for the more passionate love of the younger man Noah.

But after they started living together, she began to diminish in his eyes. Their dreams to live a happy life was interrupted by the reality – it did not matter that Noah was younger to Miriam and Miriam was a married woman and they both were not married to each other. But, now everything disturbed them. Soon Miriam becomes, for Noah, a mere despondent woman approaching middle age, another dependent burden like his mother. He thinks she is a hurdle to his freedom. The death of his

father made him feel guilty and so he decided to take up responsibility as a son. In the process, he is tossed between Miriam and his mother. Initially Noah fled home for love and now he abandons Miriam for home and ultimately for freedom. He finally flies to England, leaving his mother behind, because to Noah, both Miriam and his mother are the emotional impediments in the growth of his life.

Similarly, Solomon in *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, found his wife Clara as an impediment to his love-life. He is a man who can not settle in a place with a family. His insatiate thirst for travel and places had led him to go for variety of women. He felt that his affair with Diana Morgan ended because she felt he had a family. But Diana's view was different. She refused the idea of eloping with Solomon. But what tipped the scales against her eloping away with him was his craving for variety and renewals with other women. He was very judgmental about her misshapen limbs. Diana sensed something dark in him; that he would one day come to resent her imperfection. Solomon did not come around to carry her off. He did not insist her to come. He did not find her as an impediment, as a lover, but spurns Diana for he is afraid she may be a hindrance in his pursuit for adventure of places and women. He may have to become a considerate loving husband and a kind caretaker for Diana that would spoil his talents.

In *Barney's Version*, Barney's second wife is neglected and unrecognized so much by Barney that, she is identified only as "the second Mrs.Panofsky". She is a spoiled, rich girl who cannot hold Barney's attention even through the wedding reception. Barney was interested more in the hockey match than his newly wedded wife. Moreover, he could not take his eyes off Miriam, who had come for their reception. Bewitched by Miriam's beauty and intellect he neglected his wife even during the times of honeymoon in Paris. At one point of time he was able to convince Miriam, who though initially avoided him, for he was a married man. He feels his wife is an impediment in his way to get Miriam. But he admits that his wife was a person "full of life". "Had she not fallen into my hands but instead married a real, rather than a pretend, straight arrow, she would do a model wife and mother today" (BV 192).

His negligence leaves her embittered. But Barney was willing to go to any extent to leave his wife and to join hands with Miriam, because Miriam was the first woman with whom he had really fallen in love. Thus, Barney displays perversion, and relieved to see his wife with his best friend in bed. This brings an end easily to his problems of getting away with his wife. Second Mrs.Panofsky not able to bear the pains of Barney's negligence, no longer wanted to be seen as an impediment, agrees for a divorce settlement.

Duddy in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, in his Journey from innocence to ruthlessness is accompanied by Yvette, a pretty young French- Canadian girl. She loves Duddy and helps him in his pursuit of land. She risks buying the land for Duddy. She is disowned by her family for her affair with Duddy. To Duddy, Yvette is no more than a convenience, an object. He shows her little consideration. Duddy thinks that emotional involvement with any woman may spoil his business. As a lover, he has no problem handling Yvette but as a business man, he thinks she may stand between him and his 'duty'. Yvette devotes her hard work, time and above all herself for Duddy. She gives everything but takes nothing from him. Her characterization is very vague that she appears to have little motivation. Critics say that Yvette is a typical example to show that Richler's portrayal of women is lop-sided. She is a flat character who is a mere abstraction of an idea—selfless love.

Richler's portrayal of women in his novels as stereotyped, flat, one-dimensional figures, abstractions of symbols and lifeless portraits are not restricted to Jewish women alone but also to the gentiles. Apart from the women who fall into the above categories, there are many "invisible", "faceless" and "nameless" women whose contribution to the action of the novels is negligible. For example Rifka in *St. Urbain's Horseman*, is the protagonist's sister who appears in the novel only twice. In *Solomon*

Gursky Was Here, the names of the wives of Ephraim and Solomon are just mentioned. Their roles in the lives of their husbands are omitted. In *Son of a Smaller Hero*, some of Noah's Aunts were not even given names. Richler, unconsciously, has created many women characters, as his novels center around the Jews, Jewish family and themes. But they are not fully grown or rounded or multi-dimensional creations. There are wives of the expatriate artists in *A Choice of Enemies*, whose face, leave alone the readers, the other characters in the novel do not remember much. Though Richler has not thrown enough light on his women characters, he does not fail to bring out the essence of the real human relationships and the role of women in his novels.