

Assimilation

Throughout history, Jews kept to themselves: their social contact with non-Jews was extremely limited; their ethical, cultural and social systems were completely different from those of their neighbours. Most pointedly, the Jews' fondest dream had always been their return to the Promised Land. They were law-abiding citizens who contributed to their host nations and even took to the battlefield to defend it, but their hearts always pointed in the direction of the Promised Land. It is undeniably true that throughout history, Jews were the ultimate "outsiders". But when Jews were ready to shed their cultural differences and become genuine "insiders", the gentile society was not willing to accept them.

Since the Enlightenment Movement and the subsequent emancipation of the Jewish population of Europe and America in the 18th Century, Jews increasingly participated in and became a part of secular society. Consequently there had been a growing trend of assimilation. The result was that most countries in the Diaspora had steady or slightly declining Jewish population as Jews continued to assimilate into the countries in which they lived. The more the Jews assimilated themselves to their surrounding, they thought, the more completely would the causes for anti Jewish feelings cease to exist. But they never stopped to consider what assimilation meant. Richard

Gottheil, Professor of Semitic language and rabbinical literature at Columbia University, in his speech on “The Dangers of Assimilation” had very pertinently pointed out that the use of the word “assimilation” is borrowed from the dictionary of physiology. But in physiology, it is not the food which assimilates itself into the body. It is the body which assimilates the food. Similarly, the Jew may wish to be assimilated; he may do all he will towards this end. But if the great mass in which he lives does not wish to assimilate him and look upon him and treat him as an enemy—the struggle intensifies.

There are hundreds of stories of Jews who survived the Holocaust by disappearing into their gentile environments. In Spain, Germany and Austria, Jews had assimilated very effectively and to such an extent that many who were eventually victimized hardly were aware of their Jewishness until their persecutors asserted it. For the Jew who assimilates and thinks he is accepted by his host country, often it is horrific anti-Semitism which finally forces him to recognize that he is a Jew. Observing the anti-Semitic frenzy surrounding the Dreyfus Affair, Theodore Herzl determined that Jews could never assimilate into the gentile society. Hertzberg in his book, *Jews: The Essence and Character of a People*, asserts that anti-Semitism has also arisen when Jews have tried to assimilate into the major culture.

They tried to change or reform the culture even as they were joining it. So assimilation is the effect of anti-Semitism and vice versa.

Obviously there are different ways to interpret the term “assimilation” and the chosen interpretation could colour one’s perspective. To one, assimilation may mean abandoning the unique and important traditions of Judaism. To another, it may mean continuing those traditions but having diverse friends and experience. For some, the definition of assimilation is limited to intermarriage. In Sociology, assimilation is the process of integration whereby immigrants or other minority groups are “absorbed” into a generally larger community. This presumes a loss of all characteristics which make the newcomers different.

Noel Ignatieff in his book *How the Irish Became White* tells about the Irish and how they assimilated. Similarly, Karen Brodtkin tracks the Jewish community in the United States in his book *How Jews Became White Folks*. Both of these communities quite successfully assimilated. But the “success” of assimilation was not an antiracist success, because it was assimilation into an oppressive system. The very titles of the books show that one assimilates by ‘becoming white’. That’s how assimilation works—it is always assimilation into the dominant community. In the process, the minority community might lose something, might lose quite a lot, in fact in

'becoming white' as well. Every minority community faces this crucial predicament, so also the Jews in the novels of Richler. The ambivalence of the Jew towards his own identity and towards assimilation is reflected in Richler's work. The comic, ironic and satiric tones of Richler express the various stages of Jewish assimilation into the gentile society. The tension between assertion of Jewish heritage and rejection of Jewish roots constitutes the spectrum of Richler's exploration of Jewish survival in the post-Holocaust period.

Certainly many Jews in Richler's novels have either challenged the Jewish law or attempted to assimilate into the non-Jewish society. Some have tried to escape their identities by changing their names, lifestyle and their values. Why these attempt to escape the Jewish label? There are several possible reasons. Some of them show desire to assimilate for social emancipation: to gain entry into a wide social circle. A few try assimilation to escape the anti-Semitic attacks by hiding their Jewishness. Others find the task of being observant Jews too difficult. They feel that they cannot remain observant and members of "modern society". So they attempt assimilation to escape the ghetto.

The first category of Jews, Barney Larkin (AC), Rory Peel (ICA), Max Adler (SOSH), Benjy and Lennie (ADK), who seek social emancipation attempt assimilation because they felt their identity as a traditional Jew is a social non-starter. Barney Larkin attempts to force

his way into the gentile society. Barney is obsessed with the desire to assimilate. As a business man, he uses assimilation as a tool to expand his business. He hired Jessie, a gentile to promote the first of his restaurants. He chose her because, "He was going places, he was smart; he was going places where he could not drag a ghetto girl with her sing song and her red red lipstick" (AC 112). In the plan to expand his business, he changed his name Lazarus into Barney Larkin. As a further step towards assimilation, he married Jessie. Having a *shiksha* for his wife and moving in her circle would, Barney thought, develop his business as well as gain him recognition in the society. In a conversation with Chaim, he tells he never had time for Yiddish theatre because his wife liked only sophisticated stuff. He has been trying to tune himself to the tastes and habits of the 'other' culture. But he could not fully forsake his Jewish customs and heritage. At the cost of his Jewish identity, he seeks new identity only to be recognized by the gentiles.

At a later stage, he realizes that he could neither cope up with his gentile wife nor with her culture. He used his money to buy her and she in turn married him only for his money. His unsuccessful attempts to buy gentile friendships with his money drive him desperate. But he could not fully go back to 'himself'. The agony of remaining unrecognized leaves him frustrated and induces him to confront the

gentile world. He spends so much for Derek, his brother-in-law, that his rejection hurts him. Derek who puts up a liberal face really reveals his cruel face to Barney. Derek was not willing to offer his friendship knowing well that it is what Barney longs for. "Poor bastard, Derek thought, all he wants is to belong. But I haven't even got the humanity to grant him that" (AC 91). Richler satirizes the hypocrisy of the liberals through the character of Derek. Not only Barney, but also many characters in Richler's novels express this desire to relinquish their Jewish identity by embracing liberal humanism and at the same time feel a powerful urge to assert their Jewishness to expose the hypocrisy of the gentiles in the *facade* of "liberal ideals". Barney's attempt to assimilate fails because his wife never recognized him and eventually leaves him for another man. He has emerged as a rich business man of America but no one to recognize him as an assimilationist. In spite of everything, he is seen not as a good husband, not a normal human, not a successful business man but only as a Jew.

Rory peel in *The Incomparable Atuk* is another Jew who dreams of total assimilation into the Canadian non-Jewish society. He sees Buck Twentyman, the tycoon as the symbol of power and wealth; the representatives of the "white" protestant affluent society. The effect is, to reach the ultimate, stage of financial and social success, he wishes to assimilate. In order to gain entrance into the gentile world, Rory

disowns his Jewish roots, like Barney. Rory changes his name (his children already had “white names”) and dissociates himself from the immigrant past of his father. He establishes himself as a rich business man working for Buck Twentyman. He gives up his Jewish identity and turns a liberal. He hires non-Jews for work at his office to create an image of a liberal, tolerant man, “utterly free of prejudice” (ICA 33). He tells his father that there’s nothing wrong with employing a German maid (Brunhilde). “It is true that he paid her lavishly and didn’t object when her boy friends went into his liquor, but this was only because he wanted her to learn how liberal some Jews could be” (ICA 33).

However, it turns out that Rory’s liberalism, like Derek’s is only skin deep. Rory openly displays racial bias when Atuk expresses his plan to convert to Judaism to marry his sister. Rory objects strongly telling that an Eskimo is not fit to marry into a Jewish family. Despite his professed liberalism, Rory feels superior over Atuk, he feels Atuk is “only a dumb Eskimo. Almost a coloured man” (ICA 11). Rory uses his liberal ideology for his selfish motives. Ironically Rory’s inhuman treatment of his maid is exposed in the scenes when he asks his children to attack her in a mock war game at the underground shelter. Moreover, the war game held in the underground shelter disguised as a swimming pool, compensates for Rory’s frustration and insecurity. In other words, the gentile society becomes the target which Rory

wants to confront through violence and sadistic aggression. The underground shelter itself is a symbol of Rory's feeling of insecurity. Rory pretends to be an assimilationist but the basic fear of being a Jew remains there in him and to overcome the fear of the gentiles, he ill treats the German maid servant. His racial superiority prevents him from assimilating fully into the gentile society. All the years he was striving for assimilation into the "white" world. But when Atuk told him that every body is a "white" to him, "you're all white to me" (ICA 116), Rory couldn't take it as a "compliment, the state of grace, he had striven for all his life. But today, coming from Atuk's mouth, it was delivered as an insult" (ICA 116).

In *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, the assimilation of the middle class Jews is viewed from the social perspective. The Montreal Jews imitate the WASPS of the Westmount. They modernize the synagogues and the roles of the rabbis to suit with the mainstream culture, thus leaving the orthodox synagogues to the old and the poor. When Mr. Cohen's son's *Bar-Mitzvah* takes place, the grandfather on looking up at the modern synagogue is confused:

"Where is the synagogue?" he asked

"This is it, paw, this is the temple".

The old man looked up at the oak doors and the magnificent stained glass windows.

“It’s a Church”, he said retreating.

“It’s the Temple, paw. This is where Bernie is going to be a bar-mitzvah”. (146)

The *bar-mitzvah* scene in the novel is one of the important passages that brings out the religious assimilation of the Jews. It clearly shows the division of the Jewish community between the orthodox who have got simple occupations and the more prosperous generation. Duddy, who goes to the synagogue jeers at the pretences of the reform-minded:

The synagogue in fact was so modern that it was not called synagogue any more. It was called a temple. Duddy has never seen anything like it in his life. There was a choir and an Organ and parking for next door. The men not only wear hats but they sat together with the women. All these things were forbidden by the traditional Jewish law, but those who attended the temple were so-called reform Jews and they have modernized the law to suit life in America. (145)

Not able to withstand the changes the Jews have made to the synagogues, Dingleman once told Duddy, “The few times I stepped inside there I felt like a Jesuit in a whore house” (145). Some Jews, though not willing to accept the assimilation exercises done, remain a

witness to the changes done by the liberal Jews to catch up with the mainstream.

Richler's novels which represent the experience of Jewish immigrants are barometers of broader development in Canadian Literature. The distance that causes ripples between parents and their children as the old generation remains adhered to the European past while the younger generation is exposed to the Canadian present due to immigration is best illustrated in most of his novels. In *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, Simcha, an old Jew, who is transplanted from the antisemitic atmosphere of Eastern Europe into Canada, thinks that possession of land could possibly fulfill his emotional need for the regeneration of Jewish dignity and self-respect in the new country. Benjy, his son's conception, differs from that of his father. He is not keen on establishing his Jewish identity in the new country. On the contrary, he wishes to integrate into the gentile world. Benjy, becomes the owner of a self-made Jewish factory. In his attempt to assimilate, he presents the ambivalent picture of a man with paradoxical views. Benjy has strong communist feelings who at the same time has inclination to emulate the life style and values of a WASP gentleman. Thus, Benjy grooms his nephew Lennie to penetrate the world of the gentiles as an enlightened gentleman doctor. Whereas, Duddy follows his *zeyda* and stays away from the

tide of assimilation. While Lennie makes desperate attempts to ingratiate himself with his well-connected gentile friends, Duddy does not hesitate to use his gentile friends in order to become “a somebody”. But Lennie is disillusioned by the gentile attitude when he realizes to what extent his gentile friends took advantage of his inferior social position. Lennie’s revelation of his intention to settle in Israel marks his negative reaction to his uncle’s assimilationistic attitude and draws him closer to his *zeyda*’s conception of identity determined by the sense of belonging. While Lennie becomes the oppressed to his gentile friends, Duddy becomes the oppressor of the gentiles. The juxtaposition of the conflicting messages to assimilate and to assert oneself as a Jew is both dichotomic and disorienting.

Another Jew of Richler who joins the mainstream for social emancipation is Max Adler in the novel *Son of a Smaller Hero*. Max being the son of an immigrant desires assimilation for better prospects. Initially when he started his business, he had no idea of assimilation but he had struggled hard to compete with the gentile business men because of his Jewish identity. So when he started a new business, he wanted to lift that hurdle. Thus his new company is named Ajax Trading in which he calls himself Allen and not Adler. The odds he had fought against, being a Jew, made him to seek assimilation for an easier go in the business world which is dominated by the gentiles.

In *St. Urbain's Horseman*, Ruthy deserted by Joey, who now lives with Harry, supports the idea that being a Jew is a social non-starter. While talking about Henry to Jake, Ruthy says that, had Harry not been a Jew, with all his talents he would have easily been successful in the society. Similarly, in *Josuha Then and Now*, Carlos, a Jew living in Spain tells Joshua that it was a real disadvantage being a Jew. He says, "I was just born a Hebe like some guys come into this world with a clubfoot or stammer . . . we are not popular" (197). Though Carlos or Harry are not on the path of assimilation, their experiences that being a Jew is a hindrance to their social emancipation might lead them to think about assimilation seriously.

The next category of Jews in Richler's novels attempt assimilation to escape anti-Semitism, but this escape also has not proved successful. In *A Choice of Enemies*, Karp's intention to assimilate into the gentile society is purely because of his concentration camp experience. He survived the concentration camp in Germany. He had already paid an exorbitant price for being a Jew. His experience has taught him that Jewish identity which has caused the loss of so many human lives does not represent a source of strength but a source of weakness. Karp cannot believe in the better world; he had seen the human being at his worst and knows that another Holocaust is not in the realm of impossible. He already learnt

and knew a lot about Catholicism and when the situation gets worse again, he planned to convert. He tried everything that hid his Jewish identity. He felt most Jews are remarkably deficient in the knowledge of Nature. He was determined to remedy this and any other traits, like an emotional distaste for sea food and a tendency to tell self depreciating jokes, that might brand him. This plan of Karp is not out of self-hatred or an attempt for social emancipation. But he did not want to be targeted again. Haunted by memories and guilt, it is plausible that Karp's complete denial of his Jewishness and total assimilation into the gentile world may seem the only way to survive.

Karp completely transforms his habits and customs and establishes interpersonal contacts with the gentile world. He thinks, this change would save him from another concentration camp. Ironically his attempts to break free the clutches of his identity and to integrate into the gentile world sustains the insecurity and impotence he had experienced in the concentration camp. Karp considers the friendship of the gentiles to be his only hope and chance of survival. He feels the need to win their approval. So, even, the slightest sign of neglect from their side throws Karp into despair. Karp's rejection of Jewish heritage coupled with exclusive dependence on the gentile world has left him painfully vulnerable. Karp decides to confront Norman when he shows signs of neglect. He goes to the extent of

avenging Norman. Having failed in progressive assimilation into the gentile society, Karp returns to Israel to “assimilate” into his own society. But the Israelis refused to accept Karp; they mistrust him for having survived the Holocaust. The ambivalent feeling to assimilate, at the same time to confront the gentile society leaves him confusingly stranded to relieve the terror of his past in isolation and loneliness.

Hornstein, a Jewish pilot in *A Choice of Enemies*, resembles Barney Larkin of *The Acrobats* in his attempts to force his way into the gentile society. He wishes to assimilate so that his life among the gentile pilots will be safe and secure. Like Barney, Hornstein wishes to become indispensable to the gentile pilots by arranging for dates, liquor and the money they need. But at the same time, however he justifies his claim to social acceptance by proving his valour in the war. Though Hornstein, Karp and Barney thrive for assimilation, Hornstein unlike the rest displays dignity in his attitude and behaviour. Barney begs for the recognition and acceptance of Derek and other gentiles. Karp puts himself at the mercy of the oppressor, whereas Hornstein asserts his Jewish identity as an Allied Pilot. He demands respect as one of the Jewish soldiers taking part in fighting the Nazi enemy. But the gentile society neither tolerates nor accepts Hornstein to treat him as an equal member of the mainstream society.

In the novel *Joshua Then and Now* the fear of anti-Semitism made the people of Spain convert to Catholicism. The Jews were originally expelled from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, shortly after the moors had been driven out of Granada. Then the king gave them three months time in which to convert or leave. The Jews who resisted conversion were butchered. So, to escape anti-Semitism, many Jews converted. Carlos came from a family that had ostensibly been practicing Catholicism for hundreds of years but also continued to practise their old faith surreptitiously. Carlos feels disgusted about his predicament and tells Joshua that he is a *marrano*, means a pig or secret Jew. In the novel, the Jews in Spain were assimilated into the mainstream against their wish.

In all the above cases the attempts of assimilation fail because they are not accepted by the gentile society in spite of their desire to assimilate. Those Jews who assimilated just to feel safer were deluding themselves. They are tempted to assimilate but their rights have never been respected the way the mainstream community have. The political manipulation or an outright violence reverses the social and economic success of the Jews. So, in many cases assimilation is just an empty promise that a racist society taunts the oppressed with.

Richler's novels were written in the period in which assimilation was not something which the Jewish characters strove for; it was the

condition into which they were born. Most of Richler's characters carried much of the ghetto with them as a protective barrier against assimilation. But some disclaim their heritage and attempt or show signs of assimilation to escape the physical and psychological ghetto. Jenny (SUHM), Ruthy (ICA), Noah (SOSH) and Jake (SUHM) fit into this category.

Jenny, the sister of St. Urbain's Horseman, Jake, wants to break away the conventions and customs of the Montreal ghetto, as it stunted her growth as an individual as well as her family. She started her preparations to escape the ghetto even when she was in her adolescence. Like Jake, she kept herself different in her attitudes, reading and dressing. But she also carried her difference in observing the Jewish customs and heritage. She broke free the chains of the clumsy, closed boundaries of ghetto walls and ghetto thinking. To "do very well" away from the Montreal ghetto has become Jenny's most cherished ambition, because the Montreal ghetto, as Richler describes, is yet another exile. Jenny was keen on providing her family—that was deserted first by the father and then by the brother—enough financial support. This major responsibility can be materialized only if she moves "out". So she moves out and "makes it".

Financial success followed by social success and fame achieved away from the ghetto have become the ultimate goals that

Jenny sets for herself. So she marries a gentile who is a TV celebrity. Her desire to flee the ghetto ends up finally in assimilating into the gentile society. Her marriage with Doug Fraser is a marriage of convenience and not of love. But her attempts to run away from the ghetto can be considered a success because she is not shown, in the novel, as a victim of assimilation. Jenny has no regrets in having fled the ghetto or having sought assimilation.

Similarly, Ruthy attempts assimilation by marrying Seymour Bones. Her idea of assimilation is not like that of Jenny's. It is narrow and limited to intermarriage. Also Ruthy wanted to show her parents and community how far she can go. As a liberated ghetto girl she wished to give her conventional family a final slap in the face. Whereas in *Son of a Smaller Hero* Noah claims his right to reject his Jewish heritage in order to assimilate into the gentile society. Noah is eager to justify anti-Semitic practices in Quebec but at the same time on observing his grand father, he is of the view that it is the universal human tendency to exploit others. He is ambivalent in his attitude towards assimilation. He is ready to confront the gentiles, at the same time rationalizes his wish to integrate into the gentile world under the guise of a humanist social critic.

He knows that complete assimilation requires complete renunciation of his Jewish identity. Noah knows he cannot relinquish

his Jewish uniqueness fully and merge into the gentile community. He attempts assimilation to experience the world; to break free his embryonic situation at home. In his escapade he realizes that he is rebounded to the ghetto. The more he wanted to escape, the more he is coming closer to it.

In *St. Urbain's Horseman*, Jake achieves professional and social status in the gentile world. In spite of his success, he is yet to come to terms with the self-image of an assimilated Jew. He is fascinated by the gentile world and at the same time he carries mistrust about the same world. Jake's fantasy to leave for New York is to escape from his present life in Montreal ghetto. He seeks himself as "ghetto-liberated" and wishes to escape the suffocating atmosphere of his parents and grandparents. He asserts his individuality and resents to see the world through the "ghetto glass". He marries a gentile and steps into the London mainstream but the event of the Holocaust forever shatters the illusion of protection and security. And thus his Jewish existence in the gentile world is always a dilemma.

Jake develops a compulsive fear of another Holocaust and his vivid imagination threatens him with nightmares of his own children being murdered by the Nazis. His ambivalence towards the gentile world is marked, on the one hand by his wish to belong and on the other hand by his fear and mistrust. He still remembers the anti-Semitic

incidents of his childhood. Yet he is attracted to the gentile society, which appears to be free of fear, anxiety and restrictions. Trying to free himself from the above, he adopts a gentile way of life. In spite of his efforts, his dichotomic attitude towards the gentile world stops him from total assimilation.

Some of Richler's Jewish characters do not show any sign of assimilation. Rather, they are not willing to assimilate because of the fear of losing their identity. Among them are the elderly Jews. They were the first generation to settle in Canada. Some of them are proud of their culture and hence not only reject the idea of assimilation but vehemently oppose it. In *Son of a Smaller Hero*, the rabbi who prays at the funeral meeting of Wolf Adler, mentions in his speech that assimilation into the gentile society is a conspiracy against God. He further adds, "I would say, remember the Jews of Germany. They too were assimilationists. But they learnt their lesson too late" (149). The rabbi warns the ghetto Jews that no matter how assimilated a Jew might be, he will be identified as a Jew during times of crisis. Many German Jews were sure that they gained full-fledged membership in gentile society. But they were stunned to discover that they were shipped out to the concentration camp along with the other Jews. Not only that, even those Jews who had converted to another religion were still labeled as Jews. For in the eyes of the gentile society, a Jew is

always a Jew, no matter how diligently he tries to hide it. Karl Marx, Benjamin Disraeli and Henrich Heine were among those who were still considered Jewish even after their own or their ancestors' conversion.

Melech and Goldenberg, in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, cannot think of assimilation as they are proud of their culture. In fact, they try to protect the next generation from being swept away by the tide of assimilation. In *The Acrobats*, Blumberg fears even socializing with the gentiles because of his experiences of the Holocaust. He has been conditioned by his life experience to see every "goy" as a potential threat of suffering and persecution. Boy Wonder in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, detests the changes that were coming up in the Jewish community due to assimilation. In *The Incomparable Atuk*, Panofsky, Rory peels father, resists assimilation because of his racial superiority. Some Jews oppose assimilation through inter marriage. They feel that intermarriage has created a silent holocaust in their generation. They protest assimilation saying it is an illusion to escape from who they are. It only brings more problems. They decry conformity, conversion and marriage with a gentile. The conflict between the younger generation Jews and the elder generation Jews in terms of assimilation through intermarriage is brought out in the protests of the protagonists' fathers.

In *The Acrobats*, Barney's father was against his marriage with Jessie. He tells, "So look, Berel. I'm warning you for always. Marry that girl and you don't step into the house again. Is this what for I came to America? So my sons. . ." (91). When Barney was stubborn in his decision, his father shouted, "Go marry her. A Gentile! Nothing good will ever come of it. Only sadness. For us Jews, only sadness" (91). In spite of his father's warning, he married Jessie. His father went into mourning for Barney as if he were dead. He wrote in his will that Barney should not attend his funeral. Such was his aversion towards inter marriage. Barney regrets later when his marriage with Jessie fails.

Similarly, in *St. Urbain's Horseman*, when Jake married Nancy, his father opposed it. Jake's father sent an air mail letter, a special delivery, with a clipping from the *Montreal Midnight* enclosed. The magazine highlighted the topic MIXED MARRIAGES STINK. It began with "most mixed marriages misfire" (213). In his letter, Jake's father had said, "you take it for granted that I will bless this unholy marriage... the way you are starting out I can only see a doomed disastrous marriage, without happy ending The doors of the Hersh family will not welcome you. Not being married according to the Jewish laws, your children, if any, will be considered illegitimate" (214).

Shalinsky in *Cocksure* also utters the same words of Jake's father. Thinking Mortimer is a Jew who hides his identity, Shalinsky

tells him, "Mixed Marriages Stink". Ruthy's father in *The Incomparable Atuk* also supports the view that mixed marriages stink. Ruthy's marriage with Bones is a failure. But whenever there is a chance for a break-up, Ruthy tried to mend it not because of love but because she should not be mocked by her ghetto people for having married a gentile. Richler satirizes his characters much as to tell that intermarriage alone is not assimilation. It is the adoption of certain aspects of the culture in which they are present, in order to "fit in". But most of Richler's Jews who tried assimilation carry with them the ghetto which acts as a barrier in the process of their assimilation. If assimilation means losing one's identity to adopt that of the larger community, it doesn't seem that the Jewish community in Richler's novels do that. They do not merely drop their whole unique religious or cultural identity in order to assimilate.

The liberal ideology of Richler's protagonists is constantly downplayed by the memories of anti-Semitism and suffering undermines the validity of assimilation as a solution. This dichotomy is also represented in the works of Richler's contemporaries. Leonard Cohen suggests assimilation through total dissolution of identity as the nihilistic reality of the world. Levi Strauss points out the futility of Jewish desire to assimilate. He says that the Jews could not regain their honour by assimilating themselves as individuals to the nations

among which they lived because of the failure of liberal ideologies. Adle Wiseman asserts Jewish uniqueness. Irving Layton's hesitation between the poles of assimilation and identity reveals the close affinity with Richler's inconclusiveness about Jewish predicament in the post-war world.