

Introduction

Jews are seen as a paradoxical people, full of contradiction, conflict, irony and mystery. Jews, as Morton Weinfeld suggests in his book *Like Everyone Else. . . but Different* (2002), have created a workable synthesis of opposites. They are both the precursors of modernity and in the *avant garde*. They are both secular and sacred. They are fierce idealists striving for perfection and at the same time fragile people yearning for safety. They are tender and also tough. By clear historical continuity, they represent above all, the people of exodus, of the covenant, of the Bible, the people of Abraham, Moses, David, the people too of Jesus, of Mary, of Peter, John and Paul. Whereas many ancient people of biblical days have long since disappeared from the stage of history, the Jew stood immortal. But the unbroken history of the Jewish people had been altered by many dramatic interruptions. These impediments are the cocoons from which they were struggling to come out for the past four thousand years.

In his attempts to deal with the history of the Jews in the 20th Century, Mordecai Richler's interest in the past goes beyond nostalgia. The predicaments of the Jew, for Richler, are determined by social, political and economic factors. Jewishness, for him, is a condition determined by history. By insisting on the continuing relevance of the fate of the Jews in the present time, Richler reminds us of the

ignorance and trivialization of history in the society. According to Jewish scriptures, forgetting the past has negative consequences not just for them but also for the future generations. Their ancestors' poor memory of God's protection and provision in the past caused them to have a distorted perspective of the present. Baruch Spinoza had said, "If you want the present to be different from the past, study the past" (*Quotes of Baruch Spinoza* 1). So, Jewish ancestors painstakingly recorded their history, all of it, the good, bad and the ugly, so that the community could understand their past and prepare for the future. The understanding that the Jewish predicament is very much related to history, knowledge of the historical background of the Jews, is very important; because, the present emanates from the past.

"Writing a history of the Jews is almost writing a history of the world but from a highly peculiar angle of vision. It is world history seen from the view point of a learned and intelligent victim" says Paul Johnson in his *A History of the Jews (1987)*. The history of the Jews is a history which, with its prologue stretches over nearly four thousand years. A thorough understanding of the historical perspective is needed to follow the discussions in the main chapters and also to understand the various aspects of Jewish predicament. However, it cannot be told in a chapter of this length without selection and omission.

During the first half of the period, the history of the Jews had been mainly that of Palestine. It began among those people who occupied the area lying between the Nile River on the one side and the Tigris and the Euphrates on the other. Surrounded by ancient seats of culture in Egypt and Babylonia, by the deserts of Arabia and by the highlands of Asia Minor, the land of Canaan (later Judea, then Palestine then Israel) was a meeting place of civilizations. Traditionally, Jews around the world claim descentance mostly from the ancient Israelites who settled in the land of Israel. The Israelites traced their common lineage to the biblical patriarch Abraham through Issac and Jacob. Jewish tradition holds that the Israelites were the descendants of Jacob's twelve sons (one of which was named Judah), who settled in Egypt. Their direct descendants respectively divided into twelve tribes, who were enslaved under the rule of an Egyptian Pharaoh, often identified as Ramses II. In the Jewish faith, the emigration of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan (the Exodus), led by the prophet Moses, marks the formation of the Israelites as a people.

After this period, an Israelite monarchy was established under Saul and continued under King David and Solomon. After Solomon's reign, the nation split into two kingdoms, Israel (in the north) and Judah (in the South). Israel was conquered by the Assyrian rulers and Judah by the Babylonian Army. But after the subsequent conquest of

Babylon by the Persians, the Jews were able to form an independent Jewish Kingdom known as the Hasmonean Dynasty. But then there was no Israelite problem. They were at that time a normally constituted people on their own soil, tilling the land, pasturing their flocks, engaged in a few, very simple domestic industries. The Jews of Palestine were, in fact, indistinguishable from any other people except for the fact that they insisted on worshipping an incorporeal deity and that they had some what 'finicky' ideas of morality.

It was a little less than 2000 years ago that the condition of the Jews changed, and that they ceased to be a normal people. A series of wars in Palestine at the beginning of the Christian era, culminating but not concluding with the Roman campaign of destruction under Titus, which finally ended Jewish independence and scattered these monotheistic Palestinian peasants as salves throughout the world. While many of the Judean Jews were sold into slavery, the others became citizens of other parts of the Roman Empire. This is the traditional explanation to the Diaspora. Thus the Jews became the emblem of homeless and vulnerable humanity. The whole earth, after the Diaspora, was no more than a temporary transit-camp for them. The sense of loss and homelessness which became a cornerstone of the Jewish creed was much supported by persecutions in various parts of the world.

In the Middle ages (50 CE through 1700 CE) the Jews settled throughout Europe, especially in the area of the former Roman Empire. There are records of Jewish community in France and Germany from the 4th Century and substantial Jewish community in Spain even earlier. There can be no doubt that, for much of their history in Europe, the Jews were heavily persecuted. They were frequently massacred and exiled from various European countries. The persecution hit its first peak during the crusades. The crusades were followed by expulsions, including the banishing of all Jews in England. Many expelled Jews fled to Poland.

During the Middle ages, Jews were generally treated better by the Islamic rulers. Despite second class citizenship, Jews played prominent roles in Muslim courts and experienced a "Golden Age" in Spain from 900-1100, though the situation deteriorated after that time. The worst of the expulsion occurred following the re-conquest of Muslim Spain, which was followed by Spanish inquisition in 1492, when the entire Spanish population of around 2,00,000 Sephardic Jews were expelled. This was followed by expulsion in 1493 in Sicily (37,000 Jews) and in 1496 in Portugal. The expelled Spanish Jews fled mainly to the Ottoman Empire, Holland, and North Africa, others migrating to the Southern Europe and the Middle East.

In the 16th Century, almost no Jews lived in Western Europe. The relatively tolerant Poland had the largest Jewish population in Europe, but the calm situation for the Jews there ended when Polish and Lithuanian Jews were slaughtered in the hundreds of thousands by the Cossack Chmielnicki (1648) and by the Swedish Wars (1655). Driven by these and other persecutions, Jews moved back to Western Europe in the 17th Century. The expulsion of the Jews that of England, was revoked in 1654, but periodic expulsions from individual cities still occurred, and Jews were often restricted from land ownership and forced to live in ghettos.

During the period of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment, significant changes were happening with the Jewish Community. The Haskalah Movement paralleled the wider Enlightenment, as Jews began to campaign for emancipation from restrictive laws and integration into the wider European society. Secular and Scientific education was added to the traditional religious instruction received by students and interest in a national Jewish identity, including a revival in the study of Jewish history and Hebrew started to grow. As a result of scientific education, they excelled in the study of Astronomy and Science. The 10th Century was particularly remarkable for the progress of medicine among the Jews. Their intellectual skill was greatly admired and generally acknowledged.

The Oriental languages were familiar to them. In fact, the Jewish physicians were well received not only in the palaces of the Muslims and the Christian princes but even Popes and Prelates had them in their service, notwithstanding the canons which declared that no Jew could be permitted to be a physician or to administer remedies to a Christian. Not only physicians, many of the best brains, best musicians, artists, writers, philosophers, thinkers, scientists, industrialists, philanthropists have been of Jewish faith. Despite the fact that the society was in need of their service, they were discriminated indiscriminately.

At the same time changes were taking place in their religion. The Haskalah gave birth to the Reform and Conservative movements and planted the seeds of Zionism. Eventually Hasidic Judaism, almost opposite of Haskalah was born. It quickly gained a following with its more exuberant, mystical approach to religion. The history of the Jews is the story of a people inextricably interwoven with that of a religion. Neither can be told apart from the other. It is obvious and true that Jews would not have survived the long centuries of their total dispersion, had there not been the cement of a religion moulded to their need either to transform or to tolerate the conditions of their corporate and individual lives.

Slowly the outside world was changing and debates began over the potential emancipation of the Jews. The first country to do so was France, during the Revolution in 1789. Even so, Jews were expected only to integrate, and not to continue their traditions. Though persecutions still existed, emancipation spread throughout Europe in the 18th Century. Despite the increasing integration of the Jews, with the secular society, a new form of anti-Semitism emerged, based on the ideas of race and nationhood rather than the religious anti-Semitism, of the Middle ages. This form of anti-Semitism held that Jews were a separate and inferior race from the Aryan people of Western Europe. This led to the emergence of political parties in France, Germany and Austria-Hungary that campaigned on a platform of rolling back emancipation. These campaigns in Europe and the persecution, along with the state sponsored pogroms in Russia led a number of Jews to believe that they would only be safe in their own nation. At the same time Jewish migration to the United States created a new community: Over two million Jews arrived in the U.S. between 1890 and 1924, most from Russia and Eastern Europe.

The rest of the Jews, though became increasingly integrated in Europe, the racial anti-Semitism remained. It reached its most virulent form in the killing of approximately six million Jews during the Holocaust, almost completely obliterating the 2000 year history of the

Jews in Europe. Having endured centuries of hatred and discrimination, Jews in Europe anticipated a warm welcome from their gentile neighbours. But they were sorely disappointed. Nazism sent a bitter message to Jews. It encouraged the practise of “dislike of the unlike”. Nazis hated the Jews not because they were different but because they felt, the Jews were trying to become like them. Destroying the Jews is not the accidental by-product of Nazism but rather its inmost essence.

Nazism had obsessive and racist beliefs about Jews as “racial enemies”. Jews were subjected to arbitrary arrest, internment, torture and murder. They became the victims of a vast undertaking to “exterminate” them through planned genocide. Nazis constructed concentration camps to incarcerate (and later, often to kill) the Jews, who even had assimilated long back and had been baptized to Christianity. The bulk of Jewish prisoners were mass-executed in gas-chambers at Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek, Chelmno, Belzec, and Auschwitz. This was the first full-scale genocide using the innovations of modern science and engineering. Approximately six million Jews perished under these policies during the Holocaust.

After the 1945 defeat of the Axis powers by the Allied Nations, many German high officials were punished by the Nuremberg Trials. Germany paid reparations to Holocaust survivors world wide and to the

new Jewish State of Israel. Discriminatory hatred is common world-wide, but genocide is not. The hatred of anti-Semites was uncommonly intense that the reparations to the Holocaust survivors can only be political. It cannot heal the psychological and spiritual wounds met out to the Jews because the Jewish response to the Holocaust is not logical but psychological. Many old survivors of Holocaust opposed any dialogue with the Germans or with anyone, that implies reconciliation between Germans and the Jews.

People may differ in their attitudes regarding anti-Semitism or the sources of anti-Semitism, but no one will deny that a powerful and passionate hatred has been existing. Jews have proven that they can withstand almost any amount of persecution. They have exhibited enormous tolerance towards the persecutors. But there is something unusual about anti-Semitism. Of all discriminatory forms of hatred, hatred towards Jews is unique in many ways. It is marked by its longevity. Communism came and went; Fascism came and went; but anti-Semitism came and stayed. Edward Flannery in *The Anguish of the Jews : A History of the Anti-Semitism* (1985), says, "As a Historian of anti-Semitism looks back over the millennia of horrors he had recorded, an inescapable conclusion emerges. Anti-Semitism is different because of its longevity and consistency"(36). Next, the hatred for Jews is marked by its universality and its intensity. And the

hatred of the Jews is unique because it is a hatred that has never been defined. When one group hates another, that hatred can be traced to a few simple, well-defined reasons. In Bosnia, the people were persecuted over territory and religion; in Ireland, it was national independence and religion. Blacks were hated by some for racial reasons. But no one has yet offered a single, universally accepted reason to explain why people hate Jews. If an anti-Semite is asked to state his or her reasons for hating the Jews, his response will often contradict itself, because the reasons are truly self-contradictory. Jews were hated for being a lazy and inferior race, but also for dominating the economy and taking over the world. They were hated for stubbornly maintaining their separateness; but when they wanted to assimilate, they were hated for posing a threat to racial purity through intermarriage. Jews were seen as Pacifists and as warmongers; as capitalists, exploiters and as revolutionary communists; possessed of a 'chosen people' mentality as well as people of an inferiority complex. They are a unique people to embody such a contradictory, irrational dichotomy.

Paul Johnson, a Christian Scholar and historian wrote in his best seller, *A History of the Jews*:

One way of summing up 4000 years of Jewish history is to ask ourselves, what would have happened to the

human race if Abraham had not been a man of great sagacity; or if he had stayed in Ur and kept his higher notions to himself, and no specific Jewish people had come into being. Certainly the world without the Jews would have been a radically different place . . . All the great conceptual discoveries of the intellect seem obvious and inescapable once they have been revealed, but it requires a special genius to formulate them for the first time. The Jews had this gift. (585)

It is understandable that the suffering of the Jews is greater and more mysterious than that of any other people. It is even understandable that Jews might feel that their suffering could justify the oppression of another people. What is harder to understand is why the rest of the world has gone along with it. It is an undeniable fact that Jews have suffered. But acknowledgement of this suffering is rarely enough. Jews and others have demanded that not only should Jews' suffering be acknowledged, but that it also be accorded special status. The suffering of Jews is held to be unique, central and most importantly, mysterious. It is rarely measured against the sufferings of the other groups. Blacks, women, children, workers, peasants, minorities of all kinds have suffered, but none as much as Jews. Protestants at the hands of Catholics, Catholics at the hands of

Protestants, Pagans and Heretics, all have suffered religious persecution, but none as relentlessly as Jews. Indians, Gypsies, Aborigines and a few other tribes have been targeted for elimination, but none as murderously and as premeditatedly as Jews. It is mysterious and beyond explanation. The context in which they were persecuted or oppressed or tortured is rarely examined. The place and the role of Jews in Society, their historical relationship with Church and State, landlords and peasants are hardly ever subjected to scrutiny. While the non-Jewish attitudes to the Jews were the subject of intense interest, the Jewish attitudes to the non-Jews were rarely mentioned. Attempts to confront these issues were met with suspicion and sometimes hostility, in the fear that explanation may lead to rationalization, which may lead to exculpation and then even to justification.

However, there are many Jewish writers who attempted to express and discuss the Jewish problem in their writings. Being very good at recoding the past, the writers assuming the role of the "emissary" of the victims, produced literature that transmitted the Jewish experiences to the next generation Jews in particular and to the world in general.

Among the Jewish writers, the Jewish Canadian writers have made a significant contribution to Canadian literature. Some of

Canada's biggest and brightest literary names have been of the Jewish faith and their writing demonstrates that one's culture has an impact on one's writing. Jewish writing in Canada is characterized by linguistic and thematic influences derived from successive waves of immigration and it appeared mainly in Yiddish, Hebrew, French, and English. Some Jewish writers worked in other languages, such as German and Hungarian, reflecting the countries of their origin. Later, Jewish themes were also been treated by non-Jewish authors: for example Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven* (1944) deals with inter marriage and anti-Semitism, Phillip Child's *Day of Wrath* (1945) is concerned with the Jewish Persecution in Nazi Germany and Yves Theriault's *Aaron* (1954) concentrated on the rejection of orthodoxy and the question of assimilation. Yiddish and Hebrew writing began to appear in Canada before World War I when large numbers of Jews arrived after fleeing pogroms in Tsarist Russia. Until World War I Yiddish was widely regarded as too vulgar for serious literature. Later, it had to compete with the Zionist revival of Hebrew. Thus, most of the rabbinic sages who settled in Canada such as world-renowned Rabbi Judah Rosenberg, grand father of Mordecai Richler, wrote mainly in Hebrew.

Unlike most immigrant groups, Jews brought writers to Canada who tended to write with the "foreign" perspective for a world-wide public. The writers who arrived after World War II intensified the

“international” tendency and their influences and that of the Holocaust became dominant. The use of Yiddish declined in Canada as succeeding generations turned to English. Jewish writers publishing in English in Canada share certain concerns with their immigrant predecessors: immigrant acculturation, the Holocaust, Zionism and the birth of the state of the Israel, identity and fear of assimilation. Thus, nostalgia for the vanished traditions of European Jewish life appears in A.M. Klein’s attempt to synthesize Jewish culture and English language. In their concern over identity, Canadian Jewish writers are related to their American counterparts and reflect the international orientation of their immigrant predecessors. Through the unique linguistic and cultural experience of its authors, Jewish writing continues to enrich the Canadian identity.

The specific problem that the literature of the Holocaust faces is that its validity and merit are questioned. Some critics disqualify any attempt to tell the story of the Holocaust. George Steiner believes that the horror of the Holocaust should be conveyed through silence. Whereas Albert Camus says, “to talk about despair is to conquer it”. The challenge the Jewish literary minds of Canada faced was to find a way of making the Jewish experience accessible to the mind and emotions of the reader. The thematic pattern of Jewish experience in relation to the world’s anti-Semitic hostility first emerged in the writings

of A.M. Klein, a leading Montreal poet and Journalist in the 1930s and 1940s. Klein feels that the stereotypical views on Jews and their religion need to be shattered. His works display love and respect for his religion and culture. Nevertheless, one cannot miss his acerbic satire on religious superstitions. The theme continued to occupy a central position in the writings of the Jewish authors who followed Klein. The group includes Mordecai Richler and his contemporaries: Adele Wiseman, Leonard Cohen, Irving Layton, Miriam Waddington, Jack Ludwig and Ted Allan. Their writings reflect the facets of the Jewish experience in Canada. These writers are historically and culturally connected to Richler, regardless of various genres they employed in their reaction to the Jewish predicament in the post-Holocaust world. Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* and *Crackpot* reflect the experience of Jewish immigrants. The tensions caused between the younger and elder generation due to the latter's European past and the former's Canadian present is best illustrated in her novels. Another Jewish Canadian writer who travels in the same wavelength with that of Richler is Matt Cohen. A closely-knit family pattern and the rebellion to escape the ghetto are explored in his *The Disinherited*. Similarly Jewish themes pervade the works of Layton. Though Layton views the Jewish experience from a cultural and secular view point and not a religious one; he is aware of the fact that one can truthfully relate the Jewish experience only if he understands Judaism. "Whether he

believes in God or not, the Jewish poet must understand the Jew's relationship towards God. Layton knows this and understands the peculiar relationship between Jews and God that has developed over four thousand years" ("Jewish Themes in the Works of Irving Layton" 44).

These Jewish Canadian writers may differ in their style, technique and treatment of their themes but their attitude and concern towards their themes put them in the same literary tradition. The various dimensions of their themes have only enriched the readers rather than striking a monotonous note. Thus Richler's statement, "Every serious writer has one theme, many variations to play on it" (Woodcock, "The Uncertain World" 275), asserts that the subject matter of these writers weaves congruently through the Jewish Canadian Writings. "What Dickens did for Victorian London, these writers have accomplished for the ghetto of neo-Victorian Montreal" (Michael Greenstein, *Third Solitudes* 123).

These writers belong to the generation of Canadian Jews born to immigrants who came to Canada in the beginning of the century to escape pogroms and persecutions in Eastern Europe. They grew up in major cities of Canada where their childhood was imbued with the anti-Semitic incidents. They all witnessed, in their life time the Holocaust and the birth of the Jewish State. Though they watched the

Holocaust from the safety of the North American continent, their works reveal the extent to which the knowledge of Nazi atrocities affected the Canadian Jewish consciousness. Though none of them has made the state of Israel their home, their works often invoke the tremendous moral and emotional impact of Israel upon their Canadian Identity. One can find Jewish themes predominant in their writings.

Richler's response to the Holocaust intersperse between the two contrasting positions which emerge in the post-Holocaust Jewish writing. Richler's emotional urge to identify with Jewish suffering causes him to redefine and reassert his bonds with Judaism. At the same time, his strong ideological affinity with the liberal humanism is manifested in the desire to sever emotional bonds with the Jewish history of suffering and to integrate onto the gentile world. In his work, the event of the Holocaust constitutes a focal point of reference in his attempt to resolve his conflict of Jewish Identity. The fate of the Jews in particular during the Holocaust and post-Holocaust period is an abiding *leitmotif* in Richler's works: his heroes are frequently successful men haunted by their relatively easy ride through life, too young to fight in the war and sheltered from the horrors that afflicted fellow Jews in Europe.

The tragedy of European Jewry which coincides with Richler's early adolescence highlights the emotional impact of the writer's

formative experience of anti-Semitism. On the one hand, the anti-Semitism in Europe intensified his response of rage towards his own country which openly exhibited its strong bias against Jews in the 1930s and 40s. On the other hand, the over riding sense of Jewish helplessness and impotence in the face of the anti-Semitic world incited his desire to flee anguish and suffering through assimilation.

“Being Jewish and an intellectual means having to make a fateful decision: how to live with the gentiles”, says Ron Grossman (in “The us-and-them universe of writer Mordecai Richler”, *Chicago Tribune*). One solution to the above problem is to count the heads and escape into the majority. Some writers wrapped themselves in a cocoon of gentile culture. But Richler took the opposite approach. He certainly bestowed immortality upon the St. Urbain neighbourhood with his writing. The St. Urbain Street of his youth remains for Richler the ground of his identity and distinctiveness as a novelist. In *Discursive Displacement*, Rajasekar says:

Just as Prague witnessed the major productivity of Kafka’s writings, the actual essence of Montreal is grasped and defined by Richler in his writings as a form of “Metamorphosis This metamorphosis activates in giving the legitimate picture of Montreal Jewish

Community, which passed up an opportunity to seriously examine the role of the writer of minority. (2)

Again and again in his fiction, he has returned to this soil for strength. Like the best wine grapes grow in the roughest soil, the Montreal Jews of Richler's generation have made names for themselves. May be when Richler was writing, the buzz in the Jewish community was so great that the rest of the country could not help but notice him.

Richler enjoyed reading Evelyn Waugh, calling him the greatest novelist in the English language of his time. He admired the style of Murial Spark and read with enjoyment Philip Roth, Malamud, Celine and Bellow, but remained uninfluenced by them. He himself had said, "I've passed the age of being influenced by them". But when he started his writing, he wanted to write like Malraux, Faulkner, Jean Paul Sartre and Hemingway. More than any other predecessor, it is Hemingway who is interspersed in his early novels. *The Acrobats* is a *pastiche* of that kind of writing. Richler admits that he really did not find his own style until his fourth novel *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*.

Richler, a writer in exile, left for Europe at the age of nineteen. He visited Paris in search of other like-minded writers, who would assure him that his commitment to writing and his flight from Canada made sense. Though his first novel *The Acrobats* was published in

Canada, he produced his next six novels during his stay in London. Feeling a strong affinity with the American writers of his own generation, he nevertheless chose, after his time in Paris to live in London and not in New York. Except for a few interruptions, the London exile continued for sixteen years until his permanent return to Canada in 1972. During this time Richler as a writer, remained resolutely Canadian. All of his major characters are Canadian, sometimes Canadian in exile.

In his first novel, *The Acrobats*, the protagonist, an Anglo-French Canadian is a bewildered youth looking for absolutes in a world where it is difficult to distinguish right from wrong. His quest is conducted among characters that are essentially mouth-pieces of various ideologies. A parallel theme of the problem of relationship between the Jew and the gentile is also treated effectively in the novel.

Son of a Smaller Hero, his second novel, vividly recreates the Montreal community of Richler's youth and provides an incisive study of the growth of a sensitive, intense Jewish youth, Noah Adler, in this environment. Though the novel focuses on Jewish society and characters, Richler looks beneath the racial to the human.

His next work, *A choice of Enemies* is the first novel to have London as its setting. It centers upon a colony of Canadians and Americans exiled to London in the 1950s by McCarthyist witch hunts at

home. It is a novel about what politics does to people and how it mars their relationships with other people. His succeeding novel *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* is about Duddy, the young bumptious Jew-on-the make. Unscrupulous, inventive, ruthless and untired, Duddy is one of the magnetic personalities of Richler. The novel has a special place in Richler's own literary career. It was his fourth novel, but it was the first to gain him widespread attention, in particular, to attract interest in Canada.

The Incomparable Atuk, the next novel, has for its hero an Eskimo who comes to Toronto from Baffin Bay. Initially Atuk appears to be an artless individual whose innocence is used by the people of Toronto later it is revealed that he is no noble savage. Richler's *Cocksure* focuses on Mortimer Griffin, a gentile hero who lives in London. His experiences of reverse discrimination by Jews leave him adrift in the sea of hypocrisy and deceit. With no one to share his values or ideas, Mortimer navigates the currents of changing times all alone.

St. Urbain's Horseman, a richly textured novel of Richler revolves round Jake Hersh, a film director of modest success. His alter ego, his cousin Joey, a Nazi-hunter, and an adventurous hero of Spanish Civil War is the avenging horseman of Jake's impotent dreams. Embroiled in a scandalous trial, Jake reveals the moral

confusion of his un heroic life, steadfastly longing for the Horseman's glorious return. *Joshua Then and Now*, is about the life of Joshua Shapiro presented through a pattern of dramatic flash backs. Middle aged Joshua overcomes his inauspicious beginning in Montreal's Jewish ghetto to become a celebrated TV writer. Yet, he is an unhappy man. Incapacitated by a freak accident, anguished by the disappearance of his wife, Joshua is beleaguered by the present and tormented by the ghosts of his youth.

Richler's inventive mind and well-honed writing skills have provided the literary world with a master piece *Solomon Gursky was Here*. This novel is an excellent means of viewing the Jewish community and how it sees the world. Richler's irresistibly iconoclastic recreation of the Arctic, Jewish financial and alcoholic history comes alive. From a family of bootleggers turned legitimate, Solomon Gursky chose a very different path from that of his brothers, Bernard and Morrie. Moses Berger, fascinated by Gurskys, shadows the family to write about them.

Barney's Version is the memoirs of a 68 year old Jewish Canadian, a TV producer, drunk, thrice married Barney Panofsky who has always clung to two cherished beliefs: life is absurd and nobody truly ever understands anybody else. Barney is also charged with

murdering his best friend. The novel is built around the hero developing Alzheimer's to which he eventually succumbs.

A review of criticism of the works of Mordecai Richler becomes essential to understand the analysis in the chapters. Critics have variously interpreted the novels of Richler focussing on his style and treatment. Victor J. Ramraj in his work, *Mordecai Richler* divides Richler's novels into four categories on the basis of tone, treatment and the experiences of the characters in general. *Son of a Smaller Hero* and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* come under 'The Montreal Novels'. Ramraj says that Richler's achievement in these novels is more than just a vivid portrayal of setting. Richler provides incisive studies of two complex characters, Noah (SOSH) and Duddy (ADK) and their experiences in the Montreal ghetto. *The Acrobats* and *A Choice of Enemies* fall under 'The Political Novels'. In both the novels Richler perceives causes and ideologies to be the principal factors influencing human relationships. Richler chose to examine how ideology and politics affect the lives of the individuals. The strikingly similar novels, *The Incomparable Atuk* and *Cocksure* are categorized under 'The Humorous Novels'. Exaggerated characterization and fantastic plotting of these novels display Richler's talent for sustained humour and satire. *St. Urbain's Horseman* and *Joshua Then and Now* go beyond the restrictive settings of the earlier novels: the Montreal

ghetto, European colonies, and the Toronto social world. The novels provide a fascinating opportunity for the reader to observe Richler's artistic development and his changing emphasis and perspective.

Ramraj further says that Richler exhibits a profoundly ambivalent vision of life:

His ambivalence shows itself in various ways: in his simultaneous acceptance and rejection of the Montreal Jewish society of his childhood and youth; in his tendency to mock at the same time to accommodate human short comings; in the concurrent tolerance and censure of rogues-like Duddy Kravitz, whom, he has admitted, he both admires and despises; and in his conscious effort to be both a moral, "serious" novelist and an entertainer—two functions he regards as being antithetical to each other.(1)

Daniel Golden in an article in *Essays in Canadian Writing* makes a perceptive analysis of Richler's characters, locale and themes on the line of comparative study. He compares Richler with Saul Bellow telling that they fix their fictions in the contexts of Jewish heritage. Bellow's penchant for the abstract and philosophical and Richler's love for the comic and satire have common roots in Jewish culture. Golden says:

Saul Bellow's heroes often show the dangers of secularized intellectualism, learning bereft of ancient piety, and they pursue wholeness through mystical fervour. Richler's figures, a decidedly unintellectual bunch, capture the comparatively raw and unshaped nature of their Canadian locale, and are vehicles for the author's often rollicking comedy and scathing social satire. (64)

While Bellow's Jewish heroes have entered the mainstream of American society, Richler's heroes move in commercial spheres, especially in mass-media entertainments and marketing. Golden, in contrasting Richler's and Bellow's protagonists, views:

How poetical and abstract the situation of Bellow's characters seems when contrasted to the balance-sheet world of Mordecai Richler's protagonists, the Jewish *pusherkes*, hustling to get off St. Urbain Street. Richler is more preoccupied with Jewishness, and there are Canadian reasons for it. Relatively small, the Jewish immigrant Community in Montreal saw itself as physically and psychologically trapped between a vituperative and bigoted French Canadian enclave (65)

Rachel Feldhay Brenner tries to explore the themes of assimilation and Jew-Gentile relationship in the novels of Richler. Brenner says that Richler's works reveal the predicament of today's Jewish individual. The loss of faith in liberal ideals keeps the Jew away from integration into the gentile society. The inability to resolve the conflict between the wish to assimilate and the desire to assert Jewish identity is brought out in Richler's work. "*The Acrobats* initiates the motif of the tensions between the Jews and the Goyim [which] recur in every Richler novel" (Brenner 26).

In *Mordecai Richler*, Arnold E. Davidson makes a critical analysis of the novels of Richler. After generalizing the themes of Richler's novel, he criticizes the language and style of Richler :

If *The Acrobats* partly represents Richler's youthful tribute to Hemingway, *Son of a Smaller Hero* pays homage to Scott Fitzgerald. Gone is the staged, laconic Hemingwayesque language, the Spanish setting replete with hints of death in the afternoon, the quasi-existential test of the protagonist's manhood. Richler now resorts to occasionally baroque expository passages, to descriptions of mundane, realistic settings that are still, somehow, portentously symbolic, to the careful placing of

events that both romanticize and undermine the story of a protagonist's initiation into adulthood. (37)

He further adds that *St.Urbain's Horseman*, *The Incomparable Atuk* and *Cocksure* satirize the grotesqueries of modern manners and contemporary culture in an exaggerated way.

George Woodcock in "The Wheel of Exile" in *The Tamarack Review* had reviewed Richler's novels *St.Urbain's Horseman* and *Joshua Then and Now*. He argues that Richler had finally conjoined his two previously desperate artistic sides—the "fantastic-satirist". Richler mocked the inanities of modern popular culture, as opposed to the "rather realistic urban novelist" whose subject matter was the Jewish ghetto of his boyhood Montreal. Woodcock further said that this "synthesis seems to mark the end of a particular cycle in his [Richler's] work".

By contrast, John Ayre in "Richlerian Tales: The First Book and the Last" has said, "Richler had started writing young man's novels and kept on improving by stages until he achieved his final accomplishment *Barney's Version*. This wasn't even a bell curve. It was an upward linear trend" (8).

While discussing the themes of Alienation and identity in the novels of Richler, Michael Greenstein says, "Jewish literature in Canada shares traits with the experiences of Jews in other cultures (as

the personal examples of Edel's and Bellow's careers make clear)". He continues to say that "Every Jew drags behind himself a scrap of the ghetto, a scrap of rescued land where he takes refuge when alarmed. His chains isolate him from the world. But the chains fall when Jews are among themselves" (*Beyond the Ghetto and the Garrison: Jewish-Canadian Boundaries* 126).

Michael Darling in *Perspectives on Mordecai Richler* says that Richler's first novel was praised by the Reviewers for the realism of characterization and dialogue, and the direct and honest presentation of theme. But the novel did neither bring wealth to the author nor garner him wide critical attention. *The University of Toronto Quarterly* had judicious praise for Richler's *Son of a Smaller Hero*. Recent critics have tended to regard *Son of a Smaller Hero* his next 'first novel'. An article in *The Times Literary Supplement* however praised *Son of a Smaller Hero* as one of the best books ever to have come out of Canada. The same article holds *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* as one of the unquestionable masterpieces of Richler. Duddy, the protagonist is the most criticized characters of all his novels. He is a protagonist typically ridiculed in literature. Duddy is the *pusherke*, the "pushy Jew". Zailig Pollock's study of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* concentrates on character and moral values. Differing from other critics, Pollock sees Duddy as morally autonomous. She argues

that Duddy's values are representative of the St. Urbain Street milieu in which he has grown up. *Cocksure* is Richler's most thorough treatment of the concept of "Jew", though this novel has been widely criticized for its obscenity and profanity. Kerry McSweeney says that the novel was more controversial that a book store in England refused to stock the novel. At the same time the book was praised by John Wain and Philip Toynbee for its satire. But questions about the author's moral stance were also raised.

The *Guardian* reviews *Solomon Gursky was Here* as Richler's absolute mastery of story-telling and conveying moods. The novel follows the Gursky family over 150 years and five continents, synthesizes volumes of historical scholarships. *The Globe Mail* (1997) commented on Richler's *Barney's Version* as "a triumph . . . at once hilarious, poignant, satiric and elegiac. Barney's thirty year old marriage to Miriam, their mutual love are the novels heart and soul *Barney's Version* has an embarrassment of riches . . . woven here into wantonly generous, seamless whole". *The Montreal Gazette* says, "In *Barney's Version*, the women are his finest achievement". The positive reaction to Richler's last novel has immortalized him as a Canadian master of the genre.