Chapter I

Myth and Contemporaneity

Myths manifest the primeval instinct of mankind to respond to their circumstances and the innate urge to emphasize their collective identity. They are much more than mere narratives as they encompass the culture, nature, fears and aspirations of the people of a particular area. Myths, which typically have multiple significations, are composed of motifs that bring out the individuality along with community feeling, where the basic drive is to communicate.

At the superficial level myths are simple narratives, which bring forth an aspect of experience that is inextricably linked to the life of a particular community. At a deeper level, these narratives have a profound socio-spiritual significance drawn from the value and belief systems bequeathed to a specific community through generations of local wisdom. In other words, the insights on life from first hand knowledge of the environs trigger the timeless tales termed myths. Such narratives play a crucial part in identity formation, psychological makeup and the collective psyche of the community as a whole.
Generally, myths are universal and individualistic at the same time. As myths derive their sustenance from the cultural norms and rites of the source tradition, they form a didactic device with wide application. Yet, simultaneously myths touch upon areas capable of divergent interpretations dependent on individualistic realms of experience. In addition, myths carry minimal elaborations that foreground the core of the narrative. In short, myths voice the age-old worldly wisdom encapsulated in tradition.

Theories abound on the myth and none are conclusive by any measure. In the Introduction to *Philosophy and Mythology*, F. W. J. Schelling highlights the complex origin of myths:

Mythological representations have been neither invented nor freely accepted. The products of a process independent of thought and will, they were, for the consciousness which underwent them, of an irrefutable and incontestable reality. Peoples and individuals are only the instruments of this process, which goes beyond their horizon and which they serve without understanding. (23)

For Lévi-Strauss, “myth is a structured system of signifiers, whose internal networks of relationships are used to ‘map’ the
structure of other sets of relationships; the ‘content’ is infinitely variable and relatively unimportant.” (47)

Giorgio De Santillana and Hertha Von Dechend, in *Hamlet’s Mill*, posit myth as a “technical language” describing cosmic events:

One should pay attention to the cosmological information contained in ancient myth, information of chaos, struggle and violence . . . Plato knew . . . that the language of myth is, in principle, as ruthlessly generalizing as up-to-date “tech talk.” . . . There is no other technique, apparently, than myth, which succeeds in telling structure . . . The main merit of this language has turned out to be its built-in ambiguity. Myth can be used as a vehicle for handing down solid knowledge independently from the degree of insight of the people who do the actual telling of stories, fables, etc. (132)

Catastrophic interpretation of myth forms a minority perspective within the field of mythology. Catastrophists such as Immanuel Velikovsky believe myths to be derived from the oral histories of ancient cultures that witnessed cosmic catastrophes. He elaborates in *Worlds in Collision*:
The historical-cosmological story of this book is based on the evidence of historical texts of many peoples around the globe, on classical literature, . . . to establish (1) that there were physical upheavals of a global character in historical times; (2) that these catastrophes were caused by extraterrestrial agents; and (3) that these agents can be identified. (78)

Eliade is of the view that myths are often stories of origins, how the world and everything in it came to be in *illo tempore* (in that time). He considers religious myths as sacred histories. Freud suggests that myths are public dreams, which like private dreams, emerge from the unconscious mind. Jung agrees when he holds that myths often reveal the archetypes of the collective unconscious. Campbell also adopts a similar viewpoint. According to Campbell, myths orient people to the metaphysical dimension, explain the origins and nature of the cosmos, validate social issues, and, on the psychological plane, address themselves to the innermost depths of the psyche.

The linguistic root of the term “myth” stretches back to Greek *mythos*, meaning “word” or “speech,” “the thing spoken” or the tale told—perhaps any information transmitted verbally including both truth and falsehood. Ancient myths deal primarily with the activities
of one or more divine beings—gods, goddesses and other superhuman beings and their relationships with one another, with humans and other earth creatures and with the cosmos. At first myths were transmitted orally and gradually were preserved in written forms. Thus, myth could be defined as a literary vehicle or a kind of literature involving divine beings.

Though myth eludes definition and seems distant, they still surround, embrace, imbue and colour human consciousness. For this very reason, mythology signifies different things to different investigators. Historians pursuing myth find garbled pre-history and the migration of tribes while anthropologists uncover family tangles and tribal imperatives. Psychologists look for archetypes and mental screens or malfunctions. Sifting through the myths themselves, sorting them out, relating and re-telling them for our times, we can demonstrate the fact that what surrounds human consciousness can also reappear in the depths of a person’s mind.

The stature of myths of displaced people assumes an even greater signification. This is further heightened when all that the community involved has to fall back upon is the centuries-old ‘tradition’ of utter neglect, abject derision and downright persecution. The Jews possess this dubious distinction, so much so that the term ‘diaspora’ is almost synonymous with them.
The power of imagination mediates between the collapse of universal truths and the logic of order and predictability. Jewish thinkers and men of letters in the post Second World War felt the necessity to create new ways of conveying values and ideals. The Holocaust compelled them to create a moral system based on human self-interest rather than on absolute values (Haas 218). The appropriate moral response occurs not at the level of theory and reason, but through images and myths. For Jews these new perspectives facilitate re-evaluation of the standards based on pragmatic, realistic and humane considerations.

Traditional Jewish religion has accommodated a profusion of values throughout its history. The variety of moral systems providing resources for the contemporary Jew testifies to this ability. This pluralism of thought depended on a uniformity of action that unified the Jewish community. Sociologically, the Jewish identity was maintained through a commitment to the norms of the Jewish law, Halacha. Because of this consensus on the importance of action, the Jews were free to disagree concerning the theory motivating that action. Contemporary religious liberalism threatens that consensus and harmony. Modern morality appears bankrupt from its lack of ability to articulate a comprehensive justification for observing traditional
rituals and practices. Objective truths of the previous generation are unmasked by today's commentators and interpreters. They explain, evaluate and criticize the laws and absolute truths handed down through generations. Thus, a modern writer becomes a commentator and cultural teacher who induces "diversity of life" through "articulation of a plurality of ways to be human" (Bauman 121). Taking life as a basic text, this new genre of writers shape life by generating several alternative meanings.

Almost all Jewish writers have taken recourse to the rich store of myths to assert their distinctive perspective on life. The marginalization of their community features prominently in their writings. The long trauma of atrocities has also engendered a peculiar trait of black humour used to perfection by masters of this craft like Mordecai Richler (1931-2001).

Mordecai Richler is a third generation Canadian who had a mixed upbringing. As a youth, he straddled the traditional, orthodox life of his immigrant grandparents and the more assimilatory and less rigid attitude of his parents. His paternal grandfather sailed to Canada to escape the Eastern European pogroms and settled with other Jewish immigrants in the impoverished East End of Montreal. His maternal grandfather was a Rabbi, a Zaddik (man of holiness and wisdom) and a reasonably
successful writer who had translated the Zohar into modern Hebrew. Richler's maternal grandmother became a playwright and his mother Leah Rosenberg, at the age of seventy-five published her autobiography (1981).

The private world into which Richler was born and brought up was rigidly circumscribed by orthodoxy, fear and ignorance of French and English Canadians. Very much a part of this narrow, self-contained society, he initially attended Jewish parochial school, studied the Torah, Talmud and modern Hebrew and was expected to become a rabbi. This schooling ironically opened his eyes to the world beyond the Jewish ghetto. He was exposed to old, conservative teachers of Hebrew as well as to young female English language instructors who were “charming, bravingly modern and concerned about our future. They told us about El Campesino, how John Steinbeck wrote the truth and read Sacco’s speech to the court aloud to us” (Shovelling Trouble 1972: 20).

Richler revolted early and often against his oppressively strict Hasidic upbringing. “My initial rebellion was not very profound . . . . You could argue it was shallow. I mean, I wanted to listen to the radio on Sabbath and wanted to go to baseball games, and do whatever I liked” (Todd 17). He broke away from his formal religious training and attended Baron Byng High School where he
became further aware of the non-Jewish world and began to conceive of himself as both Jewish and Canadian.

After high school, Richler wanted to attend McGill University. Since his marks were not high enough to get admission there, he had to settle for Sir George Williams College, which he attended for two years as an English major. The academic atmosphere was not inspiring for Richler. “I became frightened that if I got a B.A., I’d get an M.A. and then I might try for a Ph.D., and that would be the end” (Cameron 119). It was at this point that he decided on Paris and literature. He went, however, not in the post-World War II Hemingway tradition to discover life, art and the city itself and to make a new literature out of those experiences, but to find other like-minded writers who could assure him that his commitment to writing and his flight from Canada made sense—“Yes, I found friends and social support for the first time in my life, and here were people who felt as I did and who disliked many of the same things I did” (Gibson 80). Those friends included young American and Canadian writers including Mavis Gallant (b. 1922), Terry Southern (1924-1995) and Alexander Trochi (1925-1984).

In Paris, Richler discovered his true university. “St. Germain des Pres was my campus, Montparnasse my frat house, and my two years there are a sweetness I retain, as others do wistful
memories of McGill or Oxford" (116). During a brief visit to Spain, Richler wrote in six weeks an apprentice novel. He revised it, discarded it and then wrote another. A friend persuaded Richler to submit this novel, *The Acrobats* (1970) for possible publication, which he did shortly before he left Paris after a two-year stint, to return to Canada. All the while, he was revising *The Acrobats*. Finally in 1954, it was published and Richler again left Canada, this time for England. He was determined to support himself by his writings. He also left Canada in order to work in a larger arena than Canada allowed.

Art imitates life. Jacob Hersh, Richler's protagonist in *St. Urbain's Horseman* (1971), in moving to London was making a journey to a new life as a man who lives by his pen. Comfortably ensconced in Hampstead, he fondly recalls Toronto's Park Plaza Roof Bar, "enjoying being at home. At ease in Canada. The homeland he had shed" (*SUH* 5). Though Richler was exposed to better editors and publishers, more prestigious publications and a more challenging literary climate, with his move to London, Richler began a long vacillating relationship with Canada. He found it necessary to return to Canada sometimes more than twice a year. Though London was a dream locus of civilization for a fellow from the provinces, on his return to Canada after twenty years, he
claimed his life in London was too narrow, that he was only dealing
with people in the arts.

As a diasporic Jew, Jake's (Richler's) home remains
elsewhere: “My life seems to function in compartments . . . . When
I’m in Montreal, I don’t believe in my life here with you and the
children . . . . But lying here with you, I can’t even believe that I’m
expected to turn up in court again in the morning.” Richler states, “I
worry about being away so long from—well, the roots of my
discontent” (Bowden 491). Richler’s discontent derives from his
creative struggle to define himself as Jew and Canadian. Though
generally universalized, his thematic concerns are examined
through Canadian characters, sensibilities and situations. Richler’s
six novels were written in London, but all his protagonists and the
settings of his several novels are Canadian, because his psyche
remained embedded in the Jewish community of Montreal.

Even after returning to Montreal, Richler was not fully
satisfied. As he professed in an interview with Ian MacDonald, he
wanted to go back to London often: “Eventually, I’d like to live in
London three or four months of the years . . . . I could no more give
it up than I could Canada” (45). The image of the mythical
wandering Jew comes to the reader’s mind when Richler and his
protagonists Jake Hersh (St. Urbain’s Horseman) and Joshua

Richler has proclaimed his affection for his native province and has stated that nowhere else in the country is as interesting or as alive. And it is this sentimental love for his native land and all of the contradictory impulses that make for a Canadian Jew that haunts This Year in Jerusalem (1994). Richler comments on his hybrid identity as a Canadian born and brought up not only on Hillel, Rabbi Akiba and Rashi, but also on blizzards, Andrew Allan’s CBC Radio “Stage” series, a crazed Maurice Richard skating in over the blue line and the Dieppe said. His wander lust assumes mythical dimensions when he spends a year in Israel. He retraces the steps of his forefathers when he undertakes this journey. What makes This Year in Jerusalem a boon not just about Israel, but about Canada and Richler as well, is that Richler connects his journey to Israel with his own personal history of growing up as a young Zionist in Canada with a grandfather who was both a rabbi and a celebrated Hasidic scholar. In this sense this book is history
made personal. The spiritual journey makes Richler more of a rebel than rabbi.

The problem of balancing the rights of the individual against the demands of the community and the urgency of the present against the claims of the past confront most contemporary Jewish writers. Relativism and alternate meanings find expression in the re-evaluation and re-interpretation of Jewish religion and myths. Works of liberal Jewish writers like Mordecai Richler become relevant in this context.

Richler deftly presents the Jewish outlook on life, which is at once universal and distinct. The portrayal is distinctive in that the narrative is rooted in Jewish experience and their unique customs. But the emotions and responses to stimuli, both external and internal, make it universal and alluring. The powerful portrayal of such instincts, best qualified as human, lend universality to these creative experiences.

Other Jewish Canadian writers show an uneasiness with the strictures of traditional *Halacha* and demand the right to personal interpretation and free choice in the behavioural patterns of their characters are Abraham Moses Klein (1909-1972), Adele Wiseman (1928-1992), Elie Wiesel (b. 1928), Irving Layton (1912-2006), Leonard Cohen (b. 1934) and Henry Kreisel (1922-1991). At first,
such a diverse group of writers appears to have little in common, but closer examination reveals their recurrent attempts to mediate between tradition and modernism, Jewish-Canadian particularism and universal significance. Though these men of letters do not have the ultimate answers, they have memory, desire and a cultural mediation that remembers its tradition. Richler advocates a balancing of tradition and subjectivism by offering various interpretations of Judaic myths and rituals.

For Richler, this re-turn means that the narratives reverse the conventional mythic patterns by changing their focus and emphasis. This re-turn looks at the root of myths, rituals and archetypes—the diverse and pluralistic experiences that gives rise to the need for making decisions in the first place. Myth turned back to its roots is a radical sense of obligation, not a defining of that obligation. Looked at this way, myth represents that “singular responsibility without which there would be no morality, law or politics” or literature (Kearny 28). Richler challenges readers to return to the originating impulse which can be made possible by acknowledging this necessity for choice. The choice may be wrong, but the choosing is not. Richler moves beyond the fixed certainties to celebrate the act of choosing despite uncertainty about the results of that choice. He opens a new possibility—a
possibility that undermines older moral certainties but which at
times promises the possibility of moving on.

Moving on beyond the content of what is chosen has
profound contemporary psychological relevance. Reaching the
awareness that making choices and moving on is acceptable and
reassuring to survivors of devastating events. Moving on in life
gives meaning and purpose to the survivors. Beyond the ethics of
survivalism, a reworking of traditional mythic patterns aids Jews to
cope up with the memory of the Holocaust and the inadequacy of
tradition as a panacea to their trauma. The technique of moving on
enables people to recognize the horrors meted out to them and
become reconciled to those who harmed them. This entails a
reworking of the tradition itself. The fabric for the re-work has to be
woven from “intertextuality of the traditions, the collective readings
of the traditions. . . and the presence(s) of the divine” (Blumenthal
4).

The contemporary method of re-tracing and re-tracking
mythical narratives combines with a traditional Jewish strategy—
that of renewing the meaning of past texts through interpretation.
This stance draws on an ancient technique stretching from
Hellenistic authors through medieval Jewish exegetes and
culminating in modern biblical interpretations. This “commentarial
tradition” affirms the dynamic quality of human thinking, the demand that no meaning can ever be taken as final. It focuses not on the “true” content of a text, but on the text as an opportunity for creativity. Yet this tradition refuses to reject the past. “It honours and respects the very words that it transcends as it transforms” (Meskin 417).

The act of transcending and transforming proceeds in an unusual fashion. It analyses trends using modern and ancient texts alike. It evokes a mythic reality, generates a plurality of meanings and elevates the process of interpretation. One of the underlying assumptions of this chapter is that while one is forced to speak abstractly about myth, every single instance of myth ought to be regarded as an occurrence that gets shaped by the specific social contours in which they are localized. In the same fashion, interpretations are simultaneously influenced by the broader, more abstract terms of the extended definitions that mythographers find themselves compelled to repeat.

The science of mythology continues to be dominated by the perspectives of an age in which it was still primarily a ‘literary’ study in which a myth was regarded as an essential ‘verbal’ phenomenon—that is, as a type of story. The ‘truth’ of myth, for example, is still all too often identified with the veracity or historicity
of particular narratives. Investigations into the nature of basic myth-making process tend to concentrate on accounting for the element of fantasy in tales. Collective in content and universal in meaning, myth transcends the here and now, the sphere of the profane and the secular. It therefore follows that myths cannot be brought into this modern world by force even though this world betrays disguised traces of mythic consciousness at work. Thus though myth seems to die in modern times, it never altogether passes from the scene. It simply persists in different forms. Modern man seeks to defeat the primeval powers by spinning new myths, intellectualizing what was originally an instinctive and unconscious process. But the more civilized the life of man becomes, "the more he wants to return to the primitive in theory . . . . Thus the present popularity corresponds to a collective need rather than a romantic infatuation" (Broch 134).

T. S. Eliot, in his review of Ulysses in The Dial of Nov. 1923, said that the most important single document concerning myth and literature in twentieth century writing in English is James Joyce's Ulysses (Eliot 1923: 7). He also pointed out that psychology and James Frazer's The Golden Bough should be taken into account to understand the uses of myth in the writing and study of literature. The problem that many authors had with Frazer was that his
valuable and multi-volume work was based on a vision of the world that grew out of the mechanistic world view of nineteenth century science. It was difficult, if not sometimes impossible, to link Frazer's work with that of the new twentieth century psychologists. What was needed in this context was a platform that could provide a comprehensive view of both the findings of modern psychology and the new science of mythology that Jung, Campbell and others like Mircea Eliade advocated. The works of Campbell and Eliade effected a renewed understanding of the relationship between myth, literature and human consciousness. Jung, Campbell and Eliade established energy as the basic element of the universe. If matter is essentially energy for Einstein, then for Campbell, Eliade and Jung, the human being is essentially a unity they would call psychic energy.

Eliade's use of the terms "sacred" and "profane" is basic to his works, which has particularly influenced the study of religion and theology. If an individual is to experience growth and development of the whole personality, the energy associated with the self must be sought and found. Not to find inner creative powers is to become the victim of either a loss of energy or of destructive energies. Thus in Campbell and Eliade there is a dualism of the creative and the destructive, of the sacred and
profane energies. Underlying both is an undifferentiated energy which sustains both and in one sense is both. For both scholars the most important myths in all societies are about the encounter of the quester with the one undifferentiated power which makes it possible for that figure to overcome destructive or profane forces (Campbell 1972, Eliade 1959).

A study of Jung as well as Eliade and Campbell can be of great help in understanding how Richler and other writers present mythic visions in their works, in their personal and intuitive ways. What in Richler for instance often seems strange or even unexplained and illogical can be made clear by studying his underlying mythic narrative in detail. Jung, Campbell and Eliade can thus help us explain individual works of literature. Richler's use of myth as narrative is perhaps a way to give order to seemingly chaotic modern experiences. Richler's search for order can also be a quest for a hidden, occasional sense of wholeness and not for an order imposed by experience.

The conceptions of myth have to be revised continually. In the light of modern scholarship, a brief classification of present theories about myth or of the angles from which myth is studied today would not be out of place. Among the variety of approaches that Richler has resorted to for his mythical patterns, the most
distinguished are historical, psychological and sociological perspectives. These approaches may sometimes be mutually opposed and in competition with each other, but nevertheless there are two facts which are widely accepted today. The first is that these theories overlap and complement each other to some extent. The second fact is that myths are multi-dimensional: a myth can be approached from different angles, some with greater relevance than others.

Myth is seen as an explanation for enigmatic phenomena. The intellect needs to conceptualize certain aspects of the universe and to establish the relationships between different phenomena. Myth is placed on par with other creative activities such as poetry or music. Myth has its own laws, its own reality and its own forms of expression. It may be looked upon as a projection of the human mind, as a symbolic structuring of the world. Thus, myth assumes the form of symbolic expression.

Myth is seen in relation to a substratum shared partly by all humans, partly only by members of the same race, nation and culture. Freud offered the concept of (day) dreams as models for myth. The message is disguised and condensed: projection of the subconscious is controlled partly by tradition, partly by elementary facts of life. Myth functions as an integrating factor in man's
adaptation to life. In myths, man is faced with fundamental problems of society, culture and nature. Myth offers opportunities of selecting different elements which satisfy both individual tendencies and social necessities. From these elements it is possible to create an individual but at the same time traditional way of viewing the world.

Myths give support to accepted patterns of behaviour by placing present-day situations in a meaningful perspective with regard to the precedents of the past. Myths provide a valid justification for obligations and privileges. Thus, myths act as safety valves by making it possible for people to ventilate their emotions without socially disruptive effects. Myths are not regarded as a random collection of stories. In a culture, there is a clear correlation between the distribution of mythical themes and what is considered socially relevant in that culture. Thus, a myth acts as a marker of social relevance. Myths are considered to reflect certain facets of culture. However, this reflection is seldom direct or photographic and it may reveal values that would otherwise be difficult to detect.

Stress is laid on the reconstruction of those events, which were most decisive in the formation of that particular myth. Myths are appraised in the light of their historical background—their
subsequent use and modification in view of new historical developments are placed in relation to their origin. Thus, some myths occur as a byproduct of a particular historical situation. Myths may also be regarded as information that is transmitted from sender to receiver via a different medium. Closer analysis of this communication process implies such things as observing the redundancy in the language of religion and in non-verbal forms of expression, the definitions of the basic elements of a message, etc.

Myths are regarded primarily as being of a narrative structure: they are seen however in relation to other narrative genres and to non-epic genres of the kind which contribute to spread the message of myth. This genre-analytical aspect of myth implies that traditional forms condition the nature of the communication process. Myth can be considered as a medium for structure. To this category belongs that method of research, which is often characterized as structural, but which deal in varying ways with the language, content and structure of myths. The structure of myths may be analysed from a syntagmatic or paradigmatic angle, for example.

In the post-Second World War era, myth has turned out to be far more comprehensive than was previously supposed. It acquires not only a new context but also a new dimension and
demands both a redefinition and fresh approach. In this larger sense, myth may be defined as any presentation of the actual in terms of the ideal. It is an expression of the concept that all things can be viewed at once under two aspects—on the one hand, temporal and immediate, on the other, eternal and transcendental. The present generation for example is but the immediate representation/manifestation of an ideal community which transcends the here and now and in which all generations are émigrés in the same way that a moment is immersed in time.

Taking the above point further, it can be seen that it is not just persons or things that are conceived as possessing a transcendental counterpart. The same holds true for historical events too. The best example of this is perhaps the Jewish belief that all the generations of Israel, not merely the actual fugitives from Egypt, were present in spirit at Mount Sinai when the Covenant was concluded (Ginzberg Vol. III: 97). Sometimes a city or temple is credited with a transcendental counterpart. Jewish tradition asserts for instance that there is an upper as well as lower Jerusalem (Ginzberg Vol. V: 292)—an idea which is echoed in many passages of the New Testament, notably in the Book of Revelation (3: 12; 21: 10). Analogous also in point of basic concept is the Jewish doctrine that the Law which was given to
Moses on Mount Sinai was but a copy of the ideal, primordial Law (Torah) which abides eternally with God (Ginzberg Vol. I: 3; Vol. II: 153; Vol. V: 307). All that it does is but a concentration in the actual and empirical of that which transpires simultaneously and automatically on an ideal level. All of these ideas go back ultimately to a recognition of the intrinsic parallelism between the real and the ideal.

Mythification in the present literary scenario implies a particular worldview and an artistic strategy. It goes beyond merely using mythological motives for artistic purposes. It can provide a new and powerful means of expressing the oppression and alienation of humanity and the spiritual crisis of modern society. The deeper sense of twentieth century mythification is found in the removal of masks that cover some eternal and immutable principles, be they manifested in the triviality of everyday life or in historic changes. With its relative treatment of time and space coordinates, modern mythification has also gone beyond traditional social limits. In the modern novel, mythological time has come to substitute historical or ‘objective’ time, since action and events no matter how specifically they are grounded in time, are presented as manifestations of eternal prototypes (Frank 3-62).
The chaotic empiricism of modern social life is organized and presented using symbolic and mythological guidelines—symbolism as a new expressive means of overcoming the fragmentation and chaos of everyday life. All this is not to suggest that the use of mythical motifs in modern themes or in structuring the narratives is a return to primitive mythology. The modern novel has been paradoxically steeped in a neo-psychology that has resulted in an emphasis of the psychology of the sub-conscious.

Richler’s novels often express predilection for the underlying psychology of events by focusing on people who are more or less (dis)affected by the contingencies of social life. Individual psychology is universalized which makes it amenable to a mythological or symbolic interpretation. Mythmaking novelists have all felt, at one point or another, the influence of Freud and Jung. The Jungian universalizing and metaphorical interpretation of the unconscious play of the imagination link the feelings of isolation, oppression and alienation that plague modern man to the pre-reflexive and intensely social psychology of archaic society. In Richler’s novels this link is however attenuated by a sense of irony that expresses the enormous distance separating modern man from the creators of primitive myth.
Many modern authors in fact seem to be resorting to mythification because of their disillusion with historicism as a theoretical or artistic point of view. This disillusion manifests their dread of cataclysmic changes and their skepticism of social progress that change the metaphysical basis of human existence and consciousness. Richler's images and myth parallels undoubtedly underlines the repetition of irresolvable conflicts and the metaphysical cyclicality of social and personal life. The result is a series of parallels and a certain degree of unity in much of his writings despite superficial differences. Richler's plunge into the world of symbolism is sometimes hesitant. For instance, dreams and visions do not extend beyond the confines of the protagonist’s consciousness. Richler's time shifts and use of unconscious ahistorical insights do not completely submerge the objective dimension that runs through his works. He tries to analyze the role of myth in organizing historical experiences and to blend tradition and innovation.

When the current myths are found wanting and the ancient myths cannot be revived, the modern writer is at a loss where to turn. What counted in his evaluation of a culture was its sensitivity of feeling, its sheer vitality of being and its depth of consciousness. What he hoped to recover was the lost mystery of sense-
knowledge, the mythic vision that the ancients possessed without having to strain for it. In Richler's fiction, myth is used as an attempt to narrate a whole human experience of which the purpose is too deep for mental explanation or description. Richler's starting point in this technique of rewriting and reworking is a brilliant intellectual experimentation based on an in-depth knowledge of myth, philosophy and religion. He plays freely with the myth material blending mythical, literary, philosophical and psychological elements from different areas in an apparently arbitrary mélange. The heterogeneous nature of this assortment of materials indicates the basic underlying unity of these elements. Moreover, within a personal mythical framework, Richler's irony, humour, symbolism, allusions and biblical subversions paradoxically reproduce the mythological interpretations of the materials.

The concept of myth itself has been reinvented in Richler's works not in itself as a substance, but as a matrix of transformations, standing not for a single thing but for a series of related possibilities. He reworks myths as an inheritance and an innovation, an escape and an obligation, a choice and a fatality, an indication and a denial. It is this Richlerian way of interpreting that accounts for the incessant kaleidoscopic redistribution of the most varied mythological motifs and Jungian, Campbellian and Eliadean
views into new contexts and plots. Myth as a narrative is manifested in Richler's works by the use of mythological schemes and motifs to interpret psychological in-depths of the individual in spite of the fact that Richler's interpretative stance is far removed from genuine myths because of its extreme subjectivity. More often, it is not the mythological symbols and parallels that reinforce the interior action and emphasize the universality of the psychological twists and turns in these novels. On the contrary, psychology is used to interpret mythological plots.

Richler has painted fictional portraits of obscure heroes—protagonists who are common men of low origin. Northrop Frye classifies heroes according to Aristotle's distinction between narratives in which the hero's power of action is greater than ours, less, or roughly the same.

Richlerian heroes are no longer semi-divinities and are often socially marginal and humiliated. They may be hated and persecuted by their families or clans. Even if the hero's particular qualities—for example, he might be labeled stupid, dirty, cunning—have important implications on the mythological level, the emphasis is placed on his marginal status. Many of these protagonists are in some way on the receiving end of persecution or oppression, sometimes by uncles or by relatives or by
neighbours. Thus, they are the heroes of the ironic mode of the novel. Ironic mode covers for example satirical fantasy and narratives in black humour. Thus used with discretion and flexibility, myth allows us to situate texts as cultural constructs belonging to an order of words rather than encountering them as isolated and spontaneous phenomena.

Literature has myth as its origin, even where it may seem to be concerned with verisimilitude or semblance of actuality, but also as its destiny: "Reading forward in history . . . we may think of our romantic, high mimetic and low mimetic modes as a series of 'displaced' myths or plot-formulas progressively moving over towards the opposite pole of verisimilitude, and then, with irony beginning to move back" (Frye 51-2). That is, with the final narrative mode we are reminded that the first and founding mode, namely myth itself, has been ever present beneath the apparent realism of literature. Just as literature descends from myth, so does irony return to myth.

Through the powerful effect of myth and narrative, Jewish Canadian writers like Richler are recovering a sense of identity, both individual and communal, which can effectively challenge and subvert the dominant ideology. As a result, these writers are fashioning alternative myths to replace the old value systems and
its rigid hierarchy. They are therefore creating their own space and their own tradition, where myth and narrative play essential roles in a newly made configuration of a sustaining sense of self and community that they claim as their own. The myth of England and Spain, myth of identity and myth of Golem are some of the narratives that Richler adopts and adapts to interrupt the linear, conventional narratives at the same time making room for the coexistence in the text of multiple voices and perspectives. Richler also uses the Bible as a sub-text and depends on the classical and Elizabethan literary conventions to achieve unconventional effects. Although many of his novels depend on Biblical stories for the protagonists’ names and destinies, this dependence is complicated by the extensive use of other sources.

Though Mordecai Richler did not take part in the Spanish Civil War as a member of the International Brigades, it had a terrific impact on his writings. The myth of Spain influenced him tremendously. Spain is also one of the three poles of location in Richler’s fiction—the other two being London and Montreal. Spain arouses in him a kind of dark romanticism verging on the Gothic: Spain as the home of lost causes, where their destroyers also lurk, personified by former Nazis who play stage villain’s role in his novels with a Spanish setting. Nevertheless, the Spain of The
Acrobats (1970) is the Spain twenty years after the domestic war. Though Fascist and Communist loyalties have the upper hand, they exist in a faded world of expatriates, failures, and refugees of jaded sensibilities. The Spain which Richler portrays is one in which the sun mostly sets.

In The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz (1959), Richler paints the portrait of a morally ambiguous, but in many ways endearing young man toiling up the mountain of success. Moreover, in this portrait, a hidden mountain lake becomes a significant place. For here, Duddy strips off his pleasant qualities together with his clothes. The lake becomes the focal point of Duddy's ambitious dreams. Yvette brings Duddy to the hidden lake as a gesture of trust and love. But when she embraces him, he breaks free of her embrace and races down the hill plunging into the lake. When Yvette tries to dry him off with a towel "Duddy realized that they were both naked and for the first time he was embarrassed" (99). Like Adam after the fall, Duddy has lost his innocence and is ashamed.

In the moral vacuum in which Duddy grows up, his father Max's tales of Dingleman assume a mythic and exemplary quality. Max presents him as a symbol of success: "picture him . . . a twenty-nine year old boy from St. Urbain Street. Whole night he
spends with those low lives . . . gangsters . . . . Will they let that little St. Urbain Street punk Jerry Dingleman leave all their money?” (23). Max’s account of Dingleman’s underhanded prowess assumes mythic proportions in Duddy’s eyes. Duddy tries to emulate him because Dingleman becomes the St. Urbain Street myth of commercial success. When Duddy makes contact with Dingleman, he realizes that his father hardly knows the racketeer. Dingleman in turn uses Duddy as a drug courier and later when Duddy badly needs money to buy his land, refuses to help him. In the process, Duddy realizes that Dingleman is not quite the Boy Wonder he is supposed to be.

Duddy’s hero worship for Dingleman undergoes a sudden reversal when he reads a newspaper headline that Jerry Dingleman is under investigation on drug smuggling charges. This report destroys the myth of Dingleman as the “Boy Wonder.” In fact, Duddy’s recovery from his nervous breakdown springs from Dingleman’s downfall—from the puncturing of the myth. However, Duddy’s emergence as a man of influence is conveyed obliquely by a waiter’s willingness to give him credit and by Max’s beginning to tell Dingleman like stories about Duddy, making him the subject of a fresh crop of myths about becoming a commercial success in spite of having been born in a ghetto.
The problems of identity, myth and commitment are elaborated to excellent effect in *Cocksure* (1971). Disconcerted by the insidious attack on his identity, Mortimer Griffin gradually succumbs to paranoia, becoming pathologically self-conscious and holding agitated self-enquiries into his own attitudes and motives. His irritation that Shalinsky should mistake him for a Jew and his anxious self-interrogations as to why this happens in fact perturbs him. It conducts him by degrees towards a state of self-loathing in the light of which the values that have hitherto structured his private universe suddenly appear vile and hypocritical.

Beneath the surrealistic and at times perhaps gratuitously scurrilous surface of this novel is a serious analysis of the deterioration of an Establishment-reared man who is deprived of the cherished myths upon which his image of himself has been founded; his belief in his own virility, in the sincerity of his liberal outlook, even in the moral validity of his heroism during the war. David Lucking opines in “Myth and Identity” that

it is this relation between personal identity and public myths which links Mortimer’s private ordeal to the larger canvas constituted by the Star Maker’s complex machinations. (47)
Mortimer is shattered when he has learned an important truth from Shalinsky. This seedy, fervently committed individual continues to insist that Mortimer is a Jew and when Mortimer demurs one final time explains patiently that “a Jew is an idea. Today you’re my idea of a Jew” (Cocksure 202). Identity is “in the end a private possession than a function of the external mythology that constitutes it and loss of faith in that mythology inevitably entails the loss of self as well” (Lucking 48). Griffin’s expatriate status denies him any external supports with which to shore up his identity, once this begins to crumble down under the pressure of Shalinsky’s investigations. It helps to underscore the fact that the myths he lives by, far from being universally valid, are fragile and dependent on their viability on the endorsement of those around—who are of course intent on preserving their own myths.

*St. Urbain’s Horseman* (1971) is structured around a trial. The novel begins with the trial underway and ends with a verdict rendered, several verdicts in fact. In “The Trial of Jake Hersh,” Zailig Pollock comments that, all the issues of the novel are organized around the legal proceeding (83). This situation traces back to the relationship between Jewish law and literature that has a long and complex history beginning with the Bible or Law transmitted by Moses to the children of Israel. No sooner does
Moses descend from Mount Sinai with the Tablets than he is forced to smash them in response to the lawless behaviour he witnesses among his people. Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher comments in *Writing and Difference* on the peculiar relationship between Jewish writings and the Law: “the poet and the Jew are not born here but elsewhere. They wander, separated from their true birth . . . . Poetic presupposes the broken Tablets” (66-7). Included within their poetic autonomy and inserted into the Tablets are Talmudic commentaries, Hermeneutics, or Rabbinic interpretations of the original Law.

Before his humiliating ordeal within the court, Jake is restless and dissatisfied, in spite of knowing that he has everything that a man could possibly want. Jake’s realization that his life has always been full of choices, bears a modest resemblance to the old Jewish goat story where a man complaints to the Rabbi of the unbearable over-crowdedness of his home. The Rabbi tells him to take in a goat. A week later, the man returns saying that now the house is even more overcrowded and it smells terrible. The Rabbi tells him to get rid of the goat. The man does as he is told, and all of a sudden, his home becomes marvelously spacious and clean.

Jake’s hero, his cousin Joey Hersh is fashioned from bits and pieces of religion and mythology. He has become the avenger
Jake needs in order to make sense out of his life. Although this figure grew out of young Jake's veneration for an older, bolder cousin, he has at present, in the novel acquired unmistakable attributes of divinity. Like the Christian God, he has an earthly representative who was once seen but now is seen no more. Jake has not seen Joey for more than twenty years. As Christians venerate relics of their Saviour, so Jake treasures Joey's saddle, and even unpaid bills and summonses, because they confirm Joey's existence. As Christians and Jews are unable to answer when asked about the injustices and horrors meted out by their 'just' God, so Jake is speechless when confronted with evidence of Joey's criminal or immoral acts. Jake considers the horseman, made in the image of the God Jake requires, as his mentor and conscience. He keeps Jake from doing anything that would be unworthy of what he considers to be the equestrian's exacting standards. For Jake truly believes that somewhere out there the equestrian is watching and judging him.

Jake’s uneasy relation with his own Jewish background, and his dim sense that contemporary life offers very little in the way of tenable myths, finds expression in a fantasy which assumes the proportion of a private cult. Jake and the other Canadians living in London feel that they have nothing in common with the expatriates
of other countries, for they are bereft even of an authentic sense of injustice in terms of which it might be possible to define their national and personal identities. "Adrift in a cosmopolitan scene of conflicting myths, only they had none. Moving among discontented commonwealth types in London, they were inclined to envy them their real grievances" (SUH 195). Establishing himself in London and attracting very considerable professional recognition is not sufficient to fill this void, for even the myth of English excellence has fallen sadly short of expectations.

Slowly, inexorably, Jake was being forced to pay the price. In Canada, he had been able to revere London and its offerings with impunity. As his father had blamed the goyim for his own inadequacies, mentally billing them for the sum of his misfortunes, so Jake had foolishly held Canada culpable for all his discontents. Coming to London, finding it considerably less than excellent, he was at once deprived of this security blanket. The more he achieved materially, the larger was his inner hunger. He would have been happiest had the capital's standards not been so readily attainable and if it were still possible for him to have icons. Jake could not find any comfort even in his cultural background, for "even as Jews, they (those of his generation) did not fit a
mythology. Not having gone like sheep to the slaughterhouse, but by also conniving to punish Arab villages with napalm" (287).

It is clearly in an effort to discover or create a myth, which can anchor his own identity that Jake’s mind reaches back to his boyhood in the Montreal ghetto. His imagination, like that of Richler’s, obsessively circles around a place that no longer exists in the real. The equestrian, haunted like himself by history, gallops around. Jake tries to compensate for his own feeling of inadequacy by externally projecting his feelings. At his father’s funeral, even though Jake learns the truth about Joey’s real character, he reaffirms his loyalty to his cousin and insists before his self-satisfied uncles that family honour rides on Joey’s back, and “my heart belongs to him” (384). In the end, it is the myth of the equestrian and not the real that counts for Jake.

Richler also touches upon the myth of Golem in St. Urbain’s Horseman. “The Golem for your information” an intoxicated Jake Hersh gravely intones to a mystified flight lieutenant Robert Waterman, “is the body without a soul . . . . He was made out of clay by Rabbi Judah Ben Bezabel in the sixteenth century to defend the Jews of Prague from a pogrom, and to my mind still wanders in the world, turning up wherever a defender is needed” (252-3). Jake tells the army man that “Jesse Hope also known as
Yosef Ben Baruch and Joey Hersh is a latest incarnation of the ancient Jewish avenger” (252).

Jake's brief sketch of the Golem is incomplete, since many variants of the old story evolved in the ghettos of Europe over the bleak centuries of the diaspora. The myth of the Golem reflects the terrible reality of the pogrom: “It is precisely this aspect of the imagination and the historical forces that stimulated it that are of the most universal interests. For as is well-known, folk legends are not accidental in their origin or fanciful fictions invented by the ‘child-like masses.’ They are a true record and mirror of the complicated historical and cultural experiences of a people” (Ausubel 605).

Jake's version has most of the essential features of the Golem myth. The Golem is the ultimate triumph of art—dead clay given life through the creative genius of an inspired man. The Golem's creator is both saint and artist, moved by compassion to use his talents to strengthen the oppressed. “The oppressed are the trembling Jews of the ghetto acutely aware of the vulnerability of their position, continually apprehensive about the recurrent mad evil of the pogrom” (Cude 1980: 173). To derive his version, Jake reaches into what he calls his "Jewish all sorts bag," a compendium of history and fiction ranging across quite a spectrum:
“Rabbi Akiba, the Thirty-six Just Men, Maimonides, The Golem, Trumpeldor and Leon Trotsky” (311).

In the light of Jake’s heterogeneous research, those elements of the myth he has repressed or ignored will take on special significance. Jake does not consider the fact that even the Jews found the Golem frightening. One form of the myth has the Golem run amok in the ghetto during the Sabbath, smashing the houses and threatening the people until the Rabbi deprives it of its energies by erasing the ineffable Name of God from its forehead. Jake does not consider the fact that many Jews regarded the Golem as a blasphemy. Another form of the myth has a presumptuous sage send a Golem to a pious Rabbi as a token of his power and the good Rabbi indignantly dissolves the Golem back into clay, declaring that man should refrain from the impiety of usurping the creative function of God. Jake’s avoidance of the seamy side of the Golem is an indication of his determination to see nothing except the heroic side of his cousin Joey.

The paradox of the Golem myth is that in the old story, evil is the reason for Golem’s creation. However, the evil is also the dark force in the old story that the Golem perpetuates. In Isaac Loeb Peretz’s succinct rendering of the myth of the Golem of Prague, the Golem goes forth and falls upon the enemies of the Jews,
tearing them limb from limb until the people of the ghetto pleads to the Rabbi to halt the slaughter. After its bloody work, the Golem returns to the synagogue where it is deprived of its energies and placed in the attic. Here it lies enshrouded in the mystic cobwebs that slowly multiply of their own accord and whoever touches them will die. The avenger has become the menace, the Golem has become the monster and the spirit of pogrom has not been eliminated.

Never does it occur to Jake that there are strong similarities between the Golem and the renowned monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Like the Golem, Monster is the ultimate triumph of art, base materials endowed with life through the creativity of a brilliant man. Like the Golem's creator, Victor Frankenstein is an extremely dedicated man moved by benevolence to seek the secret of life and help the oppressed humanity from the Angel of Death. Like the trembling Jews of the ghetto, the characters of Mary Shelley's novel live in fear, knowing that death must come, perhaps in a hideous guise. And as the Golem comes to be a redeemer, so the Monster commences as mankind's helper saving a family from hunger and cold, and a young girl from death by drowning (Cude 1972: 216). Jake's failure to see the Monster in his beloved Golem undoubtedly stems
from the tragic ending Mary Shelley devised for her novel. Richler is intent upon weaving together all the strands of Jake's tangled heritage—the Jewish and the Gentile, the colonial and the European, the Golem and the Monster and the old and the new into one splendid tapestry delineating the powers of man.

The myth of Spain which influenced Richler's writings considerably is repeatedly referred to in *Joshua Then and Now* (1980) too. Joshua's life has been conditioned not only by personal circumstances, but also by the history of his race and by the history of Europe in the Second World War. Once again, the fundamental problem of the protagonist is that of defining his own ideology in relation to some external code or value system. He is also a product of the Montreal ghetto, who, like his predecessors in Richler's fiction feels fettered by the mythology instilled into him by Jewish society.

In spite of / because of his Jewish upbringing, Joshua is seeking a more credible structure of believing in a twentieth century myth and at an early stage in his career, hopes to find it by conducting research into the Spanish Civil War. Though he has uprooted himself physically from the Montreal Jewish ghetto, he does not find it altogether easy even in Spain to abdicate his cultural identity. Joshua, in the midst of a family crisis, travels to
Spain after many years to redeem the past by confronting his old enemy once and for all. To his consternation, he finds out that Dr. Mueller has passed away. The once picturesque island has altered beyond recognition. Joshua learns that events have not transpired precisely as he remembered they had. He realized belatedly that much of his mature life had, after all, been founded on a myth.

In *Solomon Gursky was Here* (1990), the Raven stamps every aspect of the Gursky chronicle, beginning with Ephraim, who “is living with a wandering band of Esquimaux . . . and appears to be worshipped by them as a faith healer or a shaman. He goes by the name of Ephraim Gor-ski, but possibly because of his dark complexion and piercing black eyes the Esquimaux call him Tulugaq, which means raven in their lingo” (60). Their account is not quite accurate, or at least it doesn’t tally with Ephraim’s own account of the origin of his name (read by Moses in one of Solomon’s journals):

Ephraim then noted the position of the moon bobbing on the horizon. Hoping against hope that his calculations were right, he said, “I am more powerful than this foolish old man (the Inuit Shaman) or even Narssuk, (whom the Inuit worshipped) and to prove it
to you I will soon raise my arms and lead the moon, who is my servant, between you and the sun, bringing darkness in the season of light, and then, unless you obey my smallest wish, I will turn myself into a raven and pluck out your eyes one by one.” (438)

What begins as a grandiloquent though empty threat eventually becomes Ephraim's Inuit name. Ravens are now his helpers and friends. His grandson Solomon assumes many disguises all of which are associated with the different variants of the name of the raven. However, as a Gursky family crest, the raven assumes an ominous presence. “The ravens are gathering” becomes a code name for clandestine take over operations within the Gursky family business. A big, menacing, black raven pecks at Henry's window the morning of his fatal trip and his son Isaac is attacked by ravens one morning after feasting on his father's remains. The raven as eater of carrion flesh unites the horrors of the Franklin expedition where the starving sailors were driven to cannibalism and Isaac's abominable meal.

The novel's central myth, which is that of the Raven, is of native Canadian origin. In Canadian Indian mythology, raven encouraged the First People to leave the clamshell in which they lurked and to make their way in the world, where he has been
playing tricks on them ever since, for raven is a meddler who dislikes whatever the status quo happens to be. Richler makes the raven a sort of totem for the family on which his novel centers. In the source which Richler acknowledges, the Raven, a bird of the North is a trickster and meddler in the affairs of the world, with the faculty to transform his shape and “doomed to continue for ever his restless wanderings through the world” (43). Sir Hyman Kaplansky recounts several stories from this book and the ending of Solomon Gursky was Here contains lines directly cited from the collection’s first story, “The Raven and the First Men” (Reid 23). But his other aspects—lust, curiosity and the unquenchable itch to meddle and provoke things, to play tricks on the world and its creatures—these remained unsatisfied. It is as if the Raven myth provides Moses with a plot line along which the stories of Ephraim and Solomon can be told. However, Richler’s raven is more than just a mischief-maker. The raven is connected with the theme of vengeance. The shooting of Ephraim’s raven provokes a series of acts of revenge with repercussions far into the future.

While Ephraim’s revenge is of a private nature; Solomon becomes a fighter against injustice on a grander scale, and it is here that the allusion to another mythical figure is important. Solomon is a quester “for the kingdom of Prester John” (383), the
kingdom of the just. As a Jewish-Canadian Prester John and faithful to the motto of his life, Solomon Gursky tries to commit himself to causes of national and international importance. He fights in World War I, supports European resistance against Hitler and tries to promote Jewish immigration to Canada in accordance with the Marx quotation he has chosen as a motto for his life: “the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways: the point, however is to change it” (159).

Richler adorns Solomon Gursky with an infinite variety of Raven disguises: he is known variously as Mr. Corbeau, “the naturalist from California” (327); Mr. Cuervo, “a dealer in Kukuyu and Masai antiquities . . . with a gallery on . . . Rodeo Drive” (541), and Herr Dr. Otto Raven, “a little Swiss Banker” (518). He is the shadowy financial genius behind Corvus Trust of Zurich (553) and the major shareholder of the Raven mine and gold brick plant in Yellowknife. He owns mythological paintings of ravens, plants a dead raven on his brother Bernard’s grave, and at the end of the novel flies north, presumably to die, in a black Gypsy Moth that turns into a raven with flapping wings.

The great origin myths of Canadian history, exploration, trade, the myth of the Franklin expedition and the myth of the Raven are reinterpreted and reinvented in Solomon Gursky was
Here. Sir John Franklin’s last expedition has frequently captured the Canadian literary imagination for it exemplifies a Canadian culture myth: man’s struggle for civilization on the northern arctic lands. Its traditional employment in both Britain and Canada has been one of an epic ordeal. John Franklin, Francis Crosier, James Fitzjames, all the officers were considered romantic heroes when they didn’t return. In all, one hundred and thirty men were lost. It was considered the highest act of bravery to go looking for the North West passage, the nineteenth century version of King Arthur’s knights and the Holy Grail. When Franklin failed to return, it provoked the greatest man hunt in Arctic history. It took years before a Franklin search party found this message stored in a cairn, the navy required commanding officers leave many documents along the way, only this one has ever been found. It says the ships are stuck in the ice for the winter, but ends ‘all’s well.’ Then a year later, there is a hastily written confused postscript added to the margin. It tells that Franklin is dead and they are all abandoning ship. They dragged lifeboats weighing a ton a piece, carrying everything with them, from scented soaps to candlesticks.

Who were those one hundred and thirty men? Why did they embark on this quest? The renewed fascination with the Franklin
myth along with the mystery of the Northern wilderness started just a few decades ago. The bodies of three of Franklin's men were dug up by Canadian anthropologist Owen Beatty. The men had died early in the expedition on another Arctic island. Beatty made a startling discovery. He revealed the men had been slowly poisoned. Naval documents at the time of the expedition revealed that the navy had given the contract for canned food to the lowest bidder. Lead soldering had leaked into the food. The navy men ate only canned meat and vegetables and were poisoned because they were imperfectly tinned. Such poisoning would have affected their physical and mental stability. As a result of this they were driven to cannibalism as a desperate but futile last resort.

As seasons passed into years one can only imagine what they did to survive. They tried to walk to the mainland and died where they dropped. Their lips were black and their teeth were loose from scurvy. The crew would wear only British broad cloth and leather boots even in the freeze of the Arctic. Their useless leather boots made them slip on the frozen mass and glassy shale. Despair must be what ultimately killed those adventurers. Perhaps the psychological effect of what happened to these men, the elements that they had to deal with, the time length that they were in the North, had far more to do with their demise than lead
poisoning or even scurvy. It was the change in their mental attitudes that might have destroyed them. They had dreamt of sailing all the way to the ports of China on an open polar sea. Instead, they died in the worst state of human degradation. At least some men would have discovered that their ships had stopped only a few miles away from the elusive North West passage, a waterway never used by Britain, even after it was charted.

Victorian England propagated the idea that Franklin and his crew marched together as a valiant band across the desolate land and met a heroic end. The Admiralty and British public refused to hear anything unheroic about Franklin. Newspapers of the time reported that they perished gloriously. The glorious heroism was front page news in Victorian England. Writers described Franklin's death as divine struggle. He was declared an Arctic saint.

Richler revisits the Franklin myth as he is fascinated by the mystery of the North which he considers a rich reservoir for different interpretations and new meanings. Franklin's story is one of insurmountable human tragedy and desperate attempts at survival. What it tells of the human condition is what fascinates Richler. He rewrites the legendary history of the Franklin expedition, working “to inscribe Jews into prominent events of Canadian history, spots of time where official Canadian history
quite obviously does not want them to be” (Korte 495). Richler demonstrates not only the unreliability of this heroic tale but also the racist attitudes that place it at the centre of national mythology.

The tragic failure of the Franklin expedition may be considered a prime example of the British myth of cultural and intellectual superiority. Sir Franklin suffered from the malady of contemporary England. Most of the officers of the Royal Navy represented the snobbish British upper class who believed in their own invincibility. They were arrogant without any reason. They were ignorant of where they were going. The English just plunged into anything, quite often with dire results. Weak leadership, bad food, a failure to adapt, the new interpretations suggest folly more than glory. As the Franklin myth is revisited, the facts reveal human folly on a monumental scale, ships that disappear without a trace, unheeded ominous warnings, mass death and new interpretations that deny the glory, but mourns the tragedy.

Had Sir Franklin paid attention to the people who lived in the Arctic, his crew might have returned from their exploration. But the British admiralty believed the Inuits had nothing to teach them. Inuit food was considered inappropriate. There was the terrible fear of going Native. Going native meant adopting native conditions. All over the world, the British insisted in bringing their environment
with them. The land dictates how one lives in it. But if you already take your presuppositions into the landscape, then the land will just not care. It will slowly and steadily kill you. One of the reasons writers like Richler are tending to reread and rewrite the Franklin myth is that instead of man above Nature, man conquering Nature, man overcoming Nature, man has to learn to live with his environment. The lesson being drawn is that if you go against environment, it is not defined as pleasure that does you in, it is your own stupidity. Sir Franklin could have survived if he had only adopted and paid attention to the survival techniques of the Inuits.

Richler tries to put himself in Franklin's crew's position. He tries to think what their thoughts were at that time. He endeavours to think of the mind of each man, who is a different personality with his own problems. Richler, like everyone else who is fascinated with the Franklin mystery is trying to find the missing pieces of the puzzle, the big evidence that will finally tell the story of what happened to those men. As Richler has said, he has often thought what would the story be if at least one man had survived to tell the tale. Perhaps the only complete tidy explanation of this tragedy exists in the mind.

History tells us there were no survivors of the Arctic expedition: the novel tells us otherwise. Ephraim Gursky survives
while Izzy Garber apparently dies shortly after the pair's arrival in Canada in 1846. Moses Berger, the writer delving into Gursky history, discovers that the Jewish patriarch Ephraim Gursky went to Van Diemen's Land, a significant historical detail that demonstrates Richler's extensive research, for John Franklin would have been colonial governor of Van Diemen's Land at the time. Presumably the resourceful Ephraim becomes acquainted with Franklin and winds on board the *Erebus*, disguised as a surgeon. At this point Richler adds to the impressive stores on board the ship: "Six coils of stuffed derma, four dozen kosher salamis, a keg of schmaltz herring and uncounted jars of chicken fat . . . garlic cloves" (46). Later McClintock's famous discovery of the lifeboat on King William Island is given the tantalizing detail that "the only provisions in sight were forty pounds of tea, a quantity of chocolate, and a small jar of animal fat, probably walrus, that surprisingly enough tasted of chicken and burnt onions" (*SGH* 47). In light of the evidence of lead poisoning described in *Frozen in Time*, a text that Richler acknowledges, it is clear that Ephraim survives the Franklin expedition by eating kosher (Beattie and Geiger 3). It is Ephraim the Jew, supplied with untinned kosher food and adopting Inuit customs, who emerges as a survivor of the North, thus usurping two Canadian culture myths at one blow.
Ephraim sets himself up as a shamanic rabbi and brings his bizarre Judaeo-Eskimo Millenarianism to the local population. Included in the millenarian credo is a version of Yomkippur, a law "laid down by Ephraim in a foolish and absentminded moment, overlooking the fact that his faith provided for all contingencies save that of the Arctic adherent" (SGH 403). As successive expeditions in search of Franklin collect artifacts from the ride, objects first assumed to belong to an Inuit shaman are identified as a yarmulke and a talith (SGH 51). As the evidence mounts, Moses finds that no one will believe that a Jew was part of the Franklin expedition. "Let me be direct with you, Berger. It is a well-known fact that Jews who immigrated to this great country in the nineteenth century did not risk the Arctic Circle, but tended to settle in cities where there was the most opportunity for trade and advancement" (50). The resistance of the WASP professor of history to Moses' findings exposes the desire to bar Jewish people from Arctic adventures. The argument, which here bars Jews access to Canadian history, is basically the same which was used to deny them sanctuary during the Nazi years.

The WASP anti-Semitic representation of the Canadian past ignores or dismisses as "red herrings" (49) the empirical traces which Ephraim and Izzy left in the Arctic.
number of Inuit ladies who preserve Ephraim's name "or variations there of including Gor-ski, Girskee, Gurski and Goorsky" (59). By thus infiltrating one of Canada's true 'first' nations, Ephraim undermines the authority of Canada's 'founding' nations. But the results of this infiltration (unmistakably Jewish features of the Inuit's costume and customs) are overlooked because they are deemed impossible. In the light of their ancestor's achievements, then the later Gurskys' seem doubly justified in claiming a 'nobility' associated with descendancy from an Arctic explorer: "Well the Gurskys didn't come here steerage fleeing from some drecky shtetl. My family was established here before Canada even became a country. We're older. How about that?" (227) However Canada wants its heroic past to be a Gentile past. Accordingly, the Gurskys' claims are ignored as are Moses Berger's attempts to uncover historical evidence for them.

Richler subverts traditional narratives in a variety of ways in the above-mentioned works. He has resorted to a retelling and a rewriting of familiar myths as a strategy to redefine history and culture and to legitimate personal and collective memory. Richler himself has said, "we are still a fragmentary nation yet to be bound by a unifying principle, a distinctive voice, mythology of our own" ("Interview" 1974: 23). Viewed in this perspective and in the
context of similar statements he has made, it is possible for his works in totality to be interpreted as an extended investigation into possibilities of such a mythology. Richler's upbringing in the Jewish ghetto of Montreal, where he was exposed at an impressionable age to a bewildering multiplicity of traditions urging conflicting patterns of conduct and incompatible allegiances, rendered him deeply distrustful of efforts either to contrive or to perpetuate such mythologies by artificial means.

Through the novels discussed in this chapter, Richler evinces an acute consciousness not only of the relation that exists between myth and personal identity, but also of the consequences that may ensue in the interior life of an individual from his uncritical acquiescence in the ideologies, moral codes and value systems instilled into him by his society. Richler never questioned myth with all its burden of impenetrable mystery. He provides no answers; he dramatically projects the vital substance of the myth and his readers are to make of it what they can. The meaning incorporated in myth is not susceptible to rational explanation. Though Richler realized the limitation of myth, he was convinced of its immense potentialities since it employed images as well as ideas. Richler considers myth as an indication of imaginative
possibility: partial, fragmentary, uncertain in its implications, but a claim to the possibility of the wholeness of the individual.

Myth works at varying levels of consciousness and degrees of articulation and is a way of describing the foundations of social behaviour. Societies depend in some fundamental way upon an elusive and indefinite body of beliefs, many of them not wholly conscious or of precise formulation, but which are crucial to any sense a society must have about itself. Myth has gained acceptance as standing for an elusive, almost unassailable amalgam of beliefs, attitudes and feelings. The very diversity of the content of myth has created the utility of the term and guaranteed its widespread usefulness.

Richler uses myth as a means of deepening and enriching his works of art. He has borrowed and consciously used materials of a traditional mythic kind even if their use is not necessarily consistent. The traditional mythic figures that appear in Richler's works seem wholly assimilated to an imaginative scheme of the novelist's own and the mythic personage has no more evocative identity than those characters drawn from the novelist's friends and acquaintances or the wholly fictional characters that he employed. Among the possibilities that arise here is that the creative power of
Richler as mythmaker is equal to whatever traditional material he may assimilate and use.

Richler's myth or myth fragments define or at least suggest what the novels are about. But they do so with immense ambiguity. Richler manipulates the elements of myth as he pleases and assigns to them a meaning of his own choice. Obviously, this choice cannot be wholly the subject of whim, or else the connotations would become absurdly contradictory and tearing his materials out of their original sense would make their use pointless. Therefore, as Richler has effectively done, the choice has to be judicious.
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