

Early Richler, *Las Fallas*, and Sacrificing the National Self

Looking back in 1968 at his fifteen years as a “Jewish writer from Canada,” Mordecai Richler introduced his essay collection *Hunting Tigers Under Glass* with withering glances at “proliferating Canada culture boosters” (10), but also satirized his own “pompous” attempts to rise above a narrow regionalism:

Because I didn’t want to be taken for that pathetic provincial, the Canadian writer, I wouldn’t allow my first novel to be compromised by the imprint of a Toronto publisher and went out of my way to have *The Acrobats* published in England.

Neither, I now recall with embarrassment, did I wish to be classified as a Jewish writer. No, no. I was, as I pompously protested to an interviewer, a writer who merely happened to be Jewish.

Fortunately for me, a Yiddish newspaper in Montreal saw the interview and swiftly cut me down to size: “The oven is big, the loaf is small.” (8)

As a skeptic whose withering ironies and the “tendency to deflate” (*Hunting* 10) were turned both against his own attempts to deny his roots, Canadian and Jewish, *and* the pretensions of cultural nationalism in general, Richler was an exuberant shape-shifter and trickster—a thorn in the funny-bone of Canadian nationalist aspirations. Faced with the question of his own place within the CanLit canon, he would have expelled cigar smoke in our general academic direction. His defiance of national identification typifies his early process of writerly self-construction as a contrarian satirist who enthusiastically set out to skewer images of the

subsidized, artificially protected, and institutionally coddled Canadian artist. Not “compromised by the imprint of a Toronto publisher” in its initial printing, Richler’s earliest novel, *The Acrobats*, is particularly ferocious in targeting the weaknesses of the naïve Canadian artist, represented by the character of André Bennett. Indeed, the continuing importance of *The Acrobats* is emphasized in his 1970 essay, “Why I Write”: “I’m still lumbered with the characters and ideas, the social concerns I first attempted in *The Acrobats*. Every serious writer has, I think, one theme, many variations to play on it” (*Shovelling Trouble* 19).

Richler’s earliest three novels, like *The Acrobats*, are preoccupied with allegorical sacrifice, death, violent killing, or social ostracism of weak male characters who are unable to compete with bullies, patriarchs, and opportunistic predators: this narrative pattern is exemplified through the murder of the artist figure of André Bennett in *The Acrobats* (1954), the death of the weak father figure of Wolf Adler and the humiliation of Theo Hall in *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1955), and, finally, through the murder of Nicky Singleton and the social alienation of Norman Price in *A Choice of Enemies* (1957). Richler’s early novels, thus, *begin* with narratives of the *end* of weak male identities that he regards as outmoded. These weak male victims prefigure the sacrifice of an important figure of Scots-Canadian pacifism in Richler’s fourth novel, Mr. MacPherson, the high school history teacher who plays the dual roles of ethnic victimizer and national sacrificial victim in the opening chapters of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959). MacPherson arguably represents those elements of order and “polite behavior”⁽¹⁰⁾ that embody the discourse of what Daniel Coleman calls “white civility,” and it is this white civility and its attendant subterfuge and hypocrisy that kick-start the full fury of Duddy’s malicious vengeance and Richler’s satire. This essay will explore the meanings of the sacrifice of the male victims in Richler’s first four novels, and will also discuss how Richler develops a distinctive hard-boiled, vernacular style that exemplifies the tough sensibility that the male victims lack in his narrative. As the literary “executioner” of the weak male representatives of expatriate aesthetic experiment (André Bennett in *The Acrobats*), Anglophone liberal tolerance and civility (Theo Hall and Mr. MacPherson in *Son of a Smaller Hero*), Jewish compliance with patriarchy (Wolf Adler in *Son of a Smaller Hero*), and liberal tolerance (Nicky Singleton and Norman Price in *A Choice of Enemies*), Richler as the implied author will script a discursive voice that will compensate for the lack of male strength in these sacrificial victims.

While these categories of male victimization cover a broad spectrum, from Anglophone artists to Jewish fathers, all of these men suffer from an inability to take pragmatic action to protect their interests, their art, their lovers, or their social reputations from competitors or stronger, more assertive male predators. Richler, however, was not systematic in his representations of male victims, and John Moss has noted that while Richler is a “moral writer” who judges society through his characters, “this is expressed in his fiction by attitude, not a coherent moral system.” Richler “shows hurt and outrage, and perhaps less of peace and ecstasy” (144). Excoriating all folly, equally infuriated by hollow Canadian patriotism and Jewish conservatism, Richler takes aim at “popular culture, mass media, stereotypes of all sorts, numberless things that offend him. Ultimately, none of us are spared, even those who piously struggle to agree with him. He is a threat to the very least among us” (Moss 145). Yet while the terrain of Richler’s attacks is broad, the early work demonstrates the development of an increasingly confident voice that rids itself of ideological ties and becomes bolder over time. Bruce Stovel, in his preface to *A Choice of Enemies*, refers to how Richler saw himself initially as a socialist, but then wrote a “political novel to exorcise the political activist within himself”: “the novelist must be, by ideology, a man who rejects all ideologies” (xi). An essential part of this narrative of Richler’s “exorcism,” I argue, is the symbolic sacrifice of male victims.

Classic theories of symbolic sacrifice from Kenneth Burke to René Girard emphasize that sacrifice is a form of ritualized substitution that channels violent social retribution, revenge, punishment, or justice against a “surrogate victim” (Girard 2), thereby acting as a form of catharsis that manages the surplus violence which circulates through human societies. Girard emphasizes that the violence of ritualistic sacrifice is ubiquitous in the routine activities of society, and that “rites of sacrifice serve to polarize the community’s aggressive impulse and redirect them towards victims that may be actual or figurative, animate or inanimate, but that are always incapable of propagating further vengeance” (18). The figure of the surrogate sacrificial victim is explicitly referenced in Richler’s *The Acrobats*, set during the annual Valencian fiesta of St. Joseph: the festival prominently features the burning of satirical and often grotesque effigies. These sacrificed effigies are forms of the ritualized “*fallas*,” surrogates for social types from *The Acrobats*, the satirically caricatured effigies that are burned in the annual Spanish-Valencian spring rituals which symbolize the clearing away of the

accumulated past. These purgations are a prominent feature of *The Acrobats*, but ritualized victimization and the killing or ostracism of such characters are also important in Richler's three subsequent novels.

The festival of the *Fallas* in *The Acrobats* marks an important transitional period in Richler's life and writing career. During the winter of 1951 to 1952, seeking exotic European experiences far from provincial Montreal, and cheaper places to live and write, Richler made his way from Paris to Barcelona, and then to Ibiza and Valencia. On March 19, 1952, in Valencia, he witnessed the spectacular fireworks and burning of the huge effigies, including one of a "pot-bellied gypsy" (*Images* 22-23), that are part of the annual St. Joseph's fiesta. His brief memoir of this period that accompanies the photography of Peter Christopher in the travel book *Images of Spain* (1977) explicitly associates the burning of the *fallas* with the purgative destruction of bourgeois Jewish expectations, Canadian residential obligations, and even the cultural capital of high modernist literature:

. . . those flames in Valencia consumed not only a pot-bellied gypsy, after all, a stranger, but also a host of personal devils. The most wintry of my Canadian baggage as well as some of the more stultifying Jewish injunctions I had grown up with. Gone with the flames went the guilt acquired by leaving college without a degree. Not going on to medicine or law, which would have delighted my parents. Up with the smoke went the need to squirrel something away for a rainy day. The compulsion to be sensible above all. Into the ashes went the obligation to endure Canadian winters, simply because I had been born there. Or the necessity, this one more recently acquired, to understand *Finnegan's Wake* or adjudge myself shallow.

I'm a slow learner. But walking away from that fire I grasped, for the first time, that I was a free man. I owed no apologies. My life was mine to spend as I pleased. (*Images* 23)

Victor Ramraj has written that the death of André Bennett in *The Acrobats*, which occurs "simultaneously with the burning of the giant *falla*, an inanimate scapegoat of the fiesta ceremony, suggests also that he is a sacrifice for humanity—an observation supported by Chaim's remark that André's killer was the 'instrument of us all'" (188). Reinhold Kramer also regards the characters in the novel as "Fallas, exaggerated versions of human beings, made for burning, representatives of stances that must be destroyed" (99). I would add to Ramraj's and Kramer's readings of the sacrificial nature of André's death that the *fallas* are an integral part of Richler's many uses of characters as purgative effigies, and that Richler's witnessing of the pyrotechnics of the Valencian *Fallas* was crucial in the author's own identity formation (Foran 124). The *Fallas* serve as a purgative burning away of the

shackles of his imagined cultural obligations and are not “tragic” (Kramer 99), but productively liberatory and essential in his development as a satirist.

Richler’s personal struggle to define himself by a conscious rejection of provincial Canada and cultural orthodoxies might initially seem a classic Jewish Canadian version of the “romance of family progress.” This myth, described by Daniel Coleman in *Masculine Migrations*, continues to be explored by contemporary writers from other non-European diasporic traditions such as Michael Ondaatje in *Running in the Family*, Rohinton Mistry in *Such a Long Journey*, and Ven Begamudré in *Van de Graaff Days*. As Coleman states,

[a]ccording to the romance of family progress, your place of origin is a dead end. In this place, there is no future: it is too backward, too impoverished, too corrupt for you to make anything of yourself here. Especially if you are young. It is different for the old; their roots are sunk too deep in this overtilled soil to pull up now. But the young must leave this hopeless place and make a name for themselves in the big world. (131-32)

Coleman emphasizes that novels by Rohinton Mistry and Ven Begamudré represent the son’s attempt to heal the wounded father, “to rewrite and heal that composite internalized father, to compose through fiction a new relationship with that old inner pain” (*Masculine* 136). This pain results from Oedipal competition, the traumatic violence of the “Law of the Father,” and the “conflicts and anxieties of a father who loves and fears his son, who comes to see his son as inheritor and disinheritor, friend and rival, comrade and traitor” (134). The sons in these novels expose the inadequacies of the father’s version of the myth of progress. However, the romance of progress is more complicated in Richler’s first three novels because of the lack of strong father figures. For Richler, the Law of the Father is problematically weak, since the patriarchal law is often undermined by the assertions and independence of women: even Melech, the proud and rigid grandfather who resents the disrespect of Noah Adler in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, is finally reduced to an embarrassed and pathetic voyeur by his daughter, whom he accidentally spies dancing in the nude (197). She uses the occasion of his transgressive gaze to gain the ethical upper hand and to announce the end of his authority over her: “Spying on me, eh?,” Ida says in reproach to him: “I’m going and I’m glad. What are you looking at? Did you ever let me do what I want? *Once*. Ever ask me how I felt? I’m going. I’m glad, you hear?” (197). *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Richler’s second novel, features a progressive escape by *both* men and women from the domestic “cage” established through the law of the patriarchal Melech Adler.

Certainly Ida Adler, after confronting the humiliated Melech, would likely agree with the title of Richler's essay from the 1984 collection *Home Sweet Home* that "Home is Where You Hang Yourself." In this essay, Richler wrote that he left Canada in 1951 to leave his "picayune past behind" (4), and that he was "charged with a scorn for all things Canadian," though his travel experiences would later qualify this youthful disdain with the understanding that "the boring, the inane, and the absurd" (9) were available wherever one eventually settled. By 1968, the year that Richler won the Governor General's Literary Award for *Cocksure* and *Hunting Tigers Under Glass*, he had built his image as a distinctively acerbic commentator on Canadian culture through six novels and a growing body of essays in such publications as the *New York Review of Books*, *Commentary*, the *New Statesman*, *London Magazine*, and *Maclean's*. And even while Richler clearly was part of the emerging Canadian literary establishment (along with the Governor General's Award in 1968, his establishment credentials were confirmed by Canada Council Fellowships in 1959, 1960, and 1967 and even a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1961), in the late 1960s he continued to serve as a skeptical check on nationalist self-puffery. While he once regretted that Canada was "starved for culture," by 1968 he was lamenting that "now . . . the country is culture-crazed and more preoccupied than ever before with its own absence of a navel, how one yearns for Canada's engaging buckeye suspicion of art and artists of not so long ago" (*Hunting Tigers* 14). Of course, it is a "buckeye suspicion of art and artists" that colours the tone and narrative structure of Richler's first three novels, a period during which he consistently set up ineffectual Canadian artists, academics, orthodox Jewish patriarchs, expatriate writers, and representatives of white civility as the targets of his satiric vitriol.

As part of his contrarian stance, Richler at the outset cultivated a mocking, street-toughened persona that disdained abstract intellectual posturing. Even though he regarded the muscular, macho posturing of Norman Mailer as a ridiculous spectacle—"One still hopes he will stop clowning and settle down to the book he talked about for so many years" (*Hunting Tigers* 108)—he admired both the tough literary essayists like Mailer and the mature intellect of Saul Bellow: "While the toughest kids on the block [like Mailer] were brawling under an *Esquire* street lamp, the men were sitting inside writing novels. Like *Herzog*" (*Hunting Tigers* 104). Nonetheless, Richler still derided the cloistered, academically supported writer so securely removed from the gritty urban labours of the first-generation of fathers who toiled to earn a living with their hands. As an example, in his review of Bernard Malamud's

The Fixer—which he both admires and critiques for its quality of being “forced in the humanist’s greenhouse” (*Hunting Tigers* 113)—he mocks the tenured creative writers of America:

Our fathers struggled to educate us, we compete, leading with the elbows, for foundation grants. The campus in the cornfields has displaced the garment district. . . and then Hollywood (*What Makes Sammy Run*, *The Day of the Locust*) as the canvas for Jewish fiction. The archetypal ineffectual hero in today’s Jewish-American novel holds tenure at a mid-western university, usually the pillowy creative writing chair where Herzog, Gabriel Wallach (Philip Roth’s *Letting Go*) and Seymour Levin (Malamud’s *A New Life*) are already toiling. (*Hunting Tigers* 109)

Richler’s early literary identity was thus shaped by a rather conventionalized post-war rags-to-riches family romance of the vulnerable but tough and resourceful Jewish urban sons—the Duddy Kravitzes of the world. Such a protagonist participates in a Jewish Canadian “masculinizing process” that Warren Rosenberg in *Legacy of Rage* identifies as an assimilative experience that Jewish men in America, during the early twentieth century, struggled to accommodate: “Considering that many of the immigrants were escaping military service in various European armies, in part because of their culture’s ambivalent attitude toward the body and violence, becoming fully accepted Americans would be a particularly difficult struggle” (22). However, as he writes his way into the distinctively urban Canadian idioms and movements of his assertive male characters, Richler also devises the Canadian failures who must be left behind: these are the *fallas* of the past who must be destroyed to clear the ground for more robust, active agency. Thus, Richler’s rejection of narrow nationalism is inscribed in allegories of the killing of the emasculated male figures who are incapable of either effectively resisting the Law of the Father or loyally transmitting its edicts through their weak personalities. Bluntly put, Richler culls the naïve Canadian male losers in his first three novels, representatives of a naïve national self who are bereft of an assertive masculinity.

This lack of a certain *machismo* is compensated for in Richler’s own discourse by strenuous rhetorical attempts to emulate the tonalities and stylistic register of the American hard-boiled school of writing, stylistic moves that distance the implied author from the weaknesses of these victims. This hard-boiled register appears especially in the dialogue, descriptions of actions, and gendered performances of the antagonistic male characters in *The Acrobats*, like the German thug Roger Kraus in *Son of A Smaller Hero* through the language of Noah and Shloime, and in *A Choice of Enemies* in the opening scenes set in the German nightclubs:

The bar, cheap but not quite a dive, smelled of cooking fat. The tinsel decorations over the mirror were covered with dust. There were many salesmen and office workers and small businessmen about. Men with uniformly spic faces. There were a few more girls, but no other soldiers. Frank held his girl tight and she giggled and pushed his hand away from her breast—and all the men heard and watched.

One of the men, a big one with cold little eyes, came up to Ernst and pressed his arm. Ernst tightened and slipped his hand into his jacket. Malcolm watched.

“Get them out of here,” the big man said. “The girl is with us.” (*A Choice of Enemies* 16)

The losers in these early novels are men who cannot physically protect themselves or their lovers from the assertive antagonists like Kraus, or who are dominated by women: for example, André Bennett and Barney Larkin are victimized and bullied by both men and women in *The Acrobats*; or the weak and neurotically obsessive Theo Hall, the English professor in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, loses his wife to the more awkward yet virile attractions of the younger Noah Adler; and Noah Adler’s own father, Wolf, is dominated and abused by the patriarch grandfather, Melech, and by his own wife, Leah, who heaps scorn upon Wolf for being afraid of “his own shadow” (*Son* 27); and the ineffectual communist sympathizer, Norman Price, in *A Choice of Enemies*, who suffers a downward spiral in life. After serving as an RCAF pilot, he is forced to abandon his university teaching position due to his socialist ties in McCarthy-era America, then moves to London where he loses his girlfriend Sally to an East German refugee and disaffected Communist, Ernst Haupt, who has killed his brother, Nicky.

The consistent satiric targeting of these characters, and the narrative deployment of them as scapegoats who represent an emasculated and naïve aestheticism or political idealism, shape the early work of Richler. He becomes the literary executioner of the weak male idealist who, like Norman Price, cannot discern the enemy and act purposefully to defend his interests. Noah Adler, on the other hand, the protagonist of *Son of a Smaller Hero*, represents a nascent rejuvenation of assertive power, a re-masculinized Jewish son who will not, at the end of the novel, be thwarted by the cloying clutches of his mother, as he defiantly leaves for Europe to assert his mobility against her wishes. Noah’s growth and assertiveness prefigure the creation of an intriguing but ruthless new male survivor in Richler’s fourth novel, Duddy Kravitz. It is Kravitz who overshadows Richler’s previous creations, Kravitz who will become the triumphant survivor who will not leave Canada, but will undermine the forms of pacifist and condescendingly class-based, white civility represented by the Scottish Canadian high school history teacher, Mr. MacPherson.¹

The preceding overview has established Richler's preoccupation with allegorical sacrifices of the *Fallas* and I have argued that a compensatory masculinity underlies the author's own narrative self-fashioning. I will now turn to a closer, sequential consideration of the textual evidence by examining the nature of specific male victims in *The Acrobats*, *Son of a Smaller Hero*, *A Choice of Enemies*, and, finally, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. Several of these male victims are the descendants of a dominant Anglo-Canadian community that Richler regarded as insufferably conservative and soulless. André Bennett, for example, in *The Acrobats*, is a directionless, anarchistic Anglo-Canadian artist who has been granted more privileges than Richler ever knew in his own childhood: Bennett—known as “moneybags Bennett” because his father possesses a large industrial empire (122)—has been raised in Westmount where his father employs a chauffeur named Morton and his mother enjoys visits from a succession of French Canadian lovers. André is rejected at McGill by both the campus intellectuals and the “football-cocktail set” because he has refused a presumably masculinizing offer to join a fraternity. In establishing the maternally influenced, de-masculinized, and colonial milieu of the Bennett family, André recollects that his mother read him the poems of Bliss Carman while his father read the *Gazette*, or dozed off, or recited the poems of Kipling (*The Acrobats* 58). Borrowing lines that clearly echo the frequently anthologized poem of another McGill writer, F.R. Scott's “The Canadian Authors Meet” (published in 1927 in the *McGill Fortnightly Review*), Richler represents André as filled with loathing for the mediocrity of Canadian art.² The sardonic sketches of the virgin poetesses with their insipid passion and colonial attachments to British royalty, rendered in an infantilizing nursery rhyme scheme in F.R. Scott's poem, are echoed in similar images and bitterly ironic judgments in the observations of André, who clearly identifies with the satiric poet, depicted thus.

Far in a corner sits (though none would know it)
The very picture of disconsolation,
A rather lewd and most ungodly poet
Writing these verses, for his soul's salvation.
(Scott 407-08)

Bennett echoes Scott's sarcastic treatment of the “virgin poetess,” her “passions,” and the colonial adulation of traditional lyric forms and “imperial” icons that are “draped in the maple leaf”; he rages against the naïve Canadian patronage of home-grown artists and poets (*Acrobats* 77), including his own

potential benefactors who are interested in marketing his paintings in New York. His bitter impatience with both conservative Canadian poetry and trendy art results in his rejection of British and American patronage of his own work. All three national cultures are condemned in the mind of the cynical Bennett:

The Canadian artists! Mediocrity draped in the maple leaf! Sonnets by the ageing virgin grand-daughters of Tory tradesmen evoking the memories of rather un-Presbyterian passions, slick paintings by sophisticates with a shrewd eye turned towards New York. Kultchir, ladies! Step right up and get yur goddam Kultchir while it's real hot! Kultchir as celebrated by imperial favour annually consisting of fifty gold guineas for the horse that wins the King's Plate and an honorary award for either virgin poetess or pipe-smoking historian-novelist. (*Acrobats* 77)

Although André demonstrates the potential to rise above his milieu, having fled the mediocrities of Canadian culture to which he himself has contributed with his paintings, he finally cannot rise to the challenge of saving his Jewish lover, a fellow anarchist and member of the "Skeptics Club," from a lethal abortion. While the tawdry melodrama of the relationship between Ida and André is awkwardly rendered, their initial friendship puts into a play an allegory of the lost Jewish comic muse who functions as an outrageous and subversive form of the female rebel. Ida's perverse antics with the "Skeptics Club" included the writing of "neurotic letters to the college paper saying that Hitler hadn't killed off the Jews fast enough, or that the only way to settle population problems was to drop atom bombs on China and India every spring," and she also shows up in "black-face" to introduce a "negro unionist" to speak at one of the student meetings and is "promptly thrown out." At the party where André meets Ida, she "got very drunk and insisted that I do a pornographic painting of her" (*Acrobats* 122-23). While Ida is clearly reckless and silly, André loves her, and his failure to marry her or at least to help provide her with a safe abortion can be read in allegorical terms. Ida is a form of a lost anarchist muse, and she signifies the Jewish-Anglo inter-ethnic collaboration that could have been possible if André had been more assertive and resisted the Law of the Father that prohibits him from marrying her. Ida's condition, of course, is a different example of the Law of the Father that André cannot thwart so easily. His failure to protect Ida subsequently results in his awkward facing of the grief and anger of her parents after her death. André repeats this failure when he is unable to protect his new Spanish lover in Valencia, Toni, from the violence of the menacing German fascist, Roger Kraus. Failing to protect his lovers and

himself, André's demise at the hands of Kraus on the bridge in Valencia, on the night of the fiesta of St. Joseph, is a ritualized sacrifice of the victim who has set up the conditions of his own execution. Significantly, his Spanish friends Guillermo and Manuel debate whether André's death was murder or suicide (196-97). In symbolic and narratological terms, Richler kills a representative of a weak Canadian expatriate modernity and an Anglo-Canadian figure of failed artistic independence.

Early in the narrative of *The Acrobats*, the character Barney has his pronunciation of *falla* corrected by Derek: "Falya, not falla," (6) he says. The *Fallas* compel "correction" at many symbolic levels: they are present not just at the death of André, but are looming satirical effigies, ubiquitous grotesque mirrorings of the past and present society, and they provide a doubling of the characters right from the beginning of the novel and through to its ending. As the implied author observes,

Nearly every city block had undertaken to build a *falla*. The *Fallas* were made of wood and papier mâché and, although they varied in size, almost all of them were satirical. Favourites, every year, were the ones which caricatured bull-fighters and their managers. On each *falla* there were several figures filled with firecrackers. Every year the *falla* which won first prize was saved. All the others were burnt and exploded on the night of the *Día de San José*. (8)

Richler will continue to use a version of the satirical *falla* figure, a textual "effigy," or a literary surrogate for male victims that must not be imitated but mastered or killed, in his second novel, *Son of a Smaller Hero*.

In *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Richler shifts to Montreal and assumes a greater confidence in providing social interpretations of the city spaces, class divisions, generational conflicts, and barriers to inter-ethnic desire. The emasculated male in this novel is represented both by the protagonist's Jewish father, Wolf Adler, and by the English professor, a figure of white civility, Theo Hall. Both characters are also lampooned as failed "writers" who are victimized by stronger men. Wolf Adler is dominated by both his hypocritical father, Melech, who professes Orthodox values but secretly loves and supports a Polish gentile woman, and Wolf's wife, Leah Goldenberg. Wolf's diary in this novel represents a pathetically constrictive form of self-exploration and life-writing, as he neurotically measures and records his daily footsteps and the wasted time of his life in a secret code (*Smaller Hero* 173-174).³ This measuring of life's minutiae shows not only the emptiness of Wolf's life, but how the bare accounting of his life in terms of empty distances and wasted time is symptomatic of his powerlessness. In a similar

fashion, Theo Hall's fastidious ordering of his daily schedule reflects his fear of spontaneity. His inhibited nature, similar to Wolf Adler's, is attributed to a controlling female figure, in this case his mother, for "His days, from the very beginning, had been ordered. When he had been a small boy his mother had ordered them for him, just as she had ordered his father's days, hardly allowing him time enough for death" (*Smaller Hero* 69). Theo's rigidly ordered life and lack of spontaneity render him unable to recognize and cope with the disruptive energy of Noah's affair with Miriam, and the orderly state of his familiar home also affords no protection from the "ineffable terror" that he suffers and his feeling of "drowning" as he begins to sense the changing nature of Miriam's relationship with Noah (*Smaller Hero* 69). When faced with the physical evidence of Noah's adulterous love of Miriam, he meekly "swung back as though to hit Noah, shut his eyes, faltered, and collapsed on the floor"(102).

In contrast to both his father and Theo Hall, Noah Adler breaks away from the constrictive influence of the parent figures in his life and from his relationship with Miriam in order to start afresh in Europe. The suffocatingly Oedipal grip of his mother on Noah is broken; she declares, as he leaves, that his act is equivalent to matricide. In fact, it is the very act of "writing," unappreciated by Noah's mother as an important bridge of understanding, that is read by his mother as a murder weapon. Hence, in the last encounter between Noah and his mother, he declares, "I'll write you every week, Maw," and she counters with "Write, don't write. To put a knife into my back would have been kinder. Now go. Go. Be happy" (*Smaller Hero* 196).

The "knife in the back" motif appears again in the sacrificial dynamics of Richler's next novel, *A Choice of Enemies*, which allegorizes the sacrifice of the naïve, liberal self through the fatal stabbing of Nicky Singleton by Ernst Haupt, the East German refugee. The vulnerable naiveté of both Nicky and Norman is exposed in their initial trust of Ernst, even while they are warned about the possibilities of deception and betrayal by their friends. The character Sonny warns Norman against someone who has likely been in the Hitler Youth and stolen Norman's girlfriend:

Look, Norm, in this world you've got to make a choice of enemies or you just can't live. The boy stands for everything you and I are against. Haven't we suffered enough for our beliefs without bending over ass backwards to help the other side? (*A Choice of Enemies* 105)

A Choice of Enemies exposes the political naiveté of Norman and the expatriate North American community in London, the expatriates who "had

come to conquer” but remain isolated outsiders with no interest in building a more intimate connection with London and Londoners:

Instead they were being picked off one by one by the cold, drink, and indifference. They abjured taking part in the communal life. . . . Unlike their forebears, they were punk imperialists. They didn't marry and settle down among the natives. They had brought their own women and electric shavers with them. They had through the years evolved from communists to fellow-travellers to tourists. Tourists. For even those who had lived in London for years only knew the true life of the city as a rumour. (*A Choice of Enemies* 132)

Thus, the Canadian expatriates are unable to shed their limiting and provincial Canadian selves and transform their diasporic community in some vital connection with English society. They seem doomed to cultural isolation, decay, and extinction.

As a further demythologization of the family romance of migration, these Canadian expatriate writers do not invent the new masterworks of their home country, but become victims of drink or hack producers of commercial writing without any Canadian content. Thus the allegory of the fall of the naïve Canadian literary artist is extended even further to a whole national group of failed migrant writers. This is a mass decline that Norman links to the efforts of the Canadian literary agent Thomas Hale who has been supporting unproductive expatriate writers with seed money:

Hale came over every year like a kafka [sic] with office to mark you down either in the book of sales or the book of rejection slips. Again and again he discovered the would-be author of the Great Canadian Novel and shipped him off to London, often at his own expense, only to discover that his hopeful had taken to gin or television writing by the time he got round to him again. But Hale was indefatigable. He didn't know that the British didn't care a damn about Canada. (*A Choice of Enemies* 133)

Unlike the authorial framing of André Bennett in *The Acrobats* or Noah Adler in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, the voice of the implied author, the moral conscience of Richler, appears in *A Choice of Enemies* to synchronize itself with the inner thoughts of the central character Norman Price. Price's consciousness, while marred by amnesia, is still provided with conceptual clarity and social insights that are more sophisticated than those of André or Noah. The insights into the complexity of evil and the difficulty of discerning the enemy render the polarization of Norman's moral and political world problematic. Norman has been imprudent in too eagerly helping Ernst, but he has not been thoughtless, and he recognizes how his own idealism has provoked his misjudgements:

If there was a time to man the barricades, Norman thought, then there is also a time to weed one's private garden. The currency of revolution is invalid as long as both tyrannies bank big bombs. Each age creates its own idiom. . . . The enemy was no longer the boor in power on the right or the bore out of power on the left. All alliances had been discredited. The enemy was the hit-and-run driver of both sides. The enemy, no longer clear, could still be recognised. (*A Choice of Enemies* 215)

To sum up, then, these consistent murderous narrative patterns underwrite Richler's first three novels. Richler's *The Acrobats* murders the artist figure of André, and identifies the failed artist with the burned *fallas*, satirical effigies of the accumulated past, ritual victims that must be purged in order to make space for the future. These figurative *fallas*, or textual effigies, receive further development in the next two novels: *Son of A Smaller Hero* murders the father and frees the son to travel to Europe; and *A Choice of Enemies* sacrifices the figures of naïve political tolerance and communism respectively embodied by Nicky Singleton and Norman Price. These various murders of naive and ideologically constricted male selves enable the invention of Richler's great picaresque "pusherke," Duddy Kravitz. Duddy's figurative "fire" is challenged by the hapless teacher, John MacPherson, who will become the lampooned *falla*. While the earlier novels usually conclude with the destruction of the figurative *fallas*, Richler places the confrontation between the protagonist and the sacrificial victim in the opening section of the novel:

'Kravitz! Put out that cigarette immediately.'
'My father is aware that I smoke, Sir.'
'Then he's not fit to bring up a boy.'
'He's my father, Sir.' (*Duddy* 9)

The opening of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* exquisitely turns the metonymic marker of the sacrificial fire, Duddy's transgressive "cigarette," which doubles as the fire of the absent but idealized Name of the Father, into a contest between teacher and pupil that will target MacPherson as the scapegoat of Duddy's devastating use of social ridicule. It is symbolically ironic if darkly fitting, then, that Duddy's compliant extinguishing of the lit cigarette is followed by a chilly snowball that catches MacPherson squarely in the back of his neck. As Duddy adds, "Nobody gets away with insulting my old man" (10). After dealing in an "icily" scorching fashion with one major public *falla* figure—MacPherson—in the first part of the novel, Richler's *Duddy Kravitz* arguably moves to a new narrative schema, scripting a complex picaresque narrative, that, in the words of Warren Tallman, is a breakthrough for Richler, an awakening from what he calls "a

sleep, a dream, a nightmare: but not the reality” (249) of the previous three novels. Richler, Tallman suggests, has finally arrived as a major talent in the creation of an intriguing picaresque hero who is stamped with an exuberant urban style that transcends the agonism of predators and victims, as Duddy dances between both roles, the tricked and the trickster, the attacked and the attacker. Finally, Duddy is the picaresque adventurer freed from paternal or cultural control:

. . . Duddy, who has ceased to care for appearances, sees people for what they are, himself included. And what he sees, he accepts—himself included. In an acquisitive world he is exuberantly acquisitive. When he is tricked, he weeps. When threatened, he becomes dangerous. When attacked, he bites back. When befriended, he is generous. When hard-pressed he becomes frantic. When denied, he is filled with wrath. From the weave of this erratic shuttling, a self struggles into presence, a naïve yet shrewd latter-day Huck Finn, floating on a battered money raft down a sleazy neon river through a drift of lives, wanting to light out for somewhere, wanting somewhere to light out for. (Tallman 251)

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke writes that the narrative representation of murder or suicide partakes in a desire for general transformation, not simply destruction: to kill an opponent or the self in the form of a literary “effigy” (5) is “analyzable as a desire to transform the principle which that person represents” (13). Killing, as Burke dialectically adumbrates, also involves the key elements of “identification” and “division” (22). Richler identifies with figures of resistance and rebellion, and he begins by purging the narrative space of weak characters and scripting the endings of emasculated male figures. The killing of these weak figures, these satirical effigies, *las fallas*, is then dramatically followed by the invention of a new kind of hero, who turns the tables on his punitive teachers at Fletcher’s Field High School by figuring them as living versions of the *Fallas* highlighted in *The Acrobats*. The scapegoating of the weak male figure is narrativized through Duddy’s calculated defeat of the idealistic and condescending John MacPherson. This Anglo-Scots representative of institutional control is undermined and finally broken by Duddy’s defiance, a resistance issued in defense of Kravitz’s father’s name and Jewish identity. The hapless male victims in Richler’s first three novels prefigure MacPherson, whose defeat marks an important early stage in the development of Richler’s icon of misrule, Duddy Kravitz.

NOTES

- 1 At both the level of allegorical narrative, and as a publishing phenomenon, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* represents Richler's inaugural institutional placement within the field of Canadian literature alongside the emerging 1960s Canadian canon, as identified in Warren Tallman's important essay, "Wolf in the Snow," in which Tallman included Richler along with Sinclair Ross, Hugh MacLennan, W.O. Mitchell, and Ernest Buckler in his 1960 survey. I would contend here that *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* represents Richler's own claim to a "plot" within the institutional landscape of Canadian literature.
- 2 Richler knew the writings and literary reputation of F.R. Scott, and, according to Charles Foran's *Mordecai: The Life & Times*, was a friend of John Sutherland's who hosted parties that were "attended by the likes of the elderly Stephen Leacock and the lawyer-poet F.R. Scott" (106). Richler's respect for Scott's opinion is clearly expressed in a 1953 letter, reproduced in Foran's biography, in which Richler solicits William Weintraub's help in asking Scott to read an early version of *The Acrobats*. Richler hopes that Scott, after reading *The Acrobats*, will be able to provide him with a letter of recommendation for a "fellowship application" (Foran 170).
- 3 The obvious parallels between Wolf Adler and Richler's father, reflected in their shared passive victimhood and peculiar journal habits, are clearly outlined in Richler's autobiographical essay, "My Father's Life," collected in *Home Sweet Home*.

WORKS CITED

- Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1969. Print.
- Coleman, Daniel. *Masculine Migrations: Reading the Postcolonial Male in 'New Canadian' Narratives*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998. Print.
- . *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2006. Print.
- Foran, Charles. *Mordecai: The Life & Times*. Toronto: Knopf, 2010. Print.
- Girard, René. *Violence and the Sacred*. 1972. Trans. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977. Print.
- Kramer, Reinhold. *Mordecai Richler: Leaving St. Urbain*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2008. Print.
- Moss, John. *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel*. Toronto: McClelland, 1977. Print.
- Ramraj, Victor. *Mordecai Richler*. Boston: Twayne, 1983. Print.
- Richler, Mordecai. *The Acrobats*. 1954. Toronto: McClelland, 2002. Print.
- . *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. 1959. Markham, ON.: Penguin, 1964. Print.
- . *A Choice of Enemies*. 1957. Toronto: McClelland, 1977. Print.
- . *Home Sweet Home*. Toronto: McClelland, 1984. Print.
- . *Hunting Tigers Under Glass*. Toronto: McClelland, 1968. Print.
- . *Shovelling Trouble*. Toronto: McClelland, 1972. Print.
- . *Solomon Gursky Was Here*. 1989. Markham, ON.: Penguin, 1990. Print.
- . *Son of a Smaller Hero*. 1955. Toronto: McClelland, 1989. Print.
- Richler, Mordecai and Peter Christopher. *Images of Spain*. Toronto: McClelland, 1977. Print.

- Rosenberg, Warren. *Legacy of Rage: Jewish Masculinity, Violence, and Culture*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2001. Print.
- Scott, F.R. 1927. "The Canadian Authors Meet." *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*. Ed. Russell Bennett and Donna Brown. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2010. 407-408. Print.
- Stovel, Bruce. "Introduction." *A Choice of Enemies*. By Mordecai Richler. 1957. Toronto: McClelland, 1977. vii-xv. Print.
- Tallman, Warren. "Wolf in the Snow." 1960. *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*. Ed. Eli Mandel. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1971. 232-53. Print.

