

NEITHER JEKYLL NOR HYDE

In Defence of Duddy Kravitz

J. A. Wainwright

IN 1969, A CANADIAN CRITIC WROTE about Duddy Kravitz in his apprenticeship years, "His decisions have been made on the wrong terms, have been based on nothing at all. He has destroyed himself and others for a piece of land that means nothing to those who have loved him."¹ In 1979, another Canadian critic wrote of the adolescent Duddy, "he is a grating amoral force who is all undirected drive and aggression."² This latter critic, insisting that we should recognize Duddy's withered humanity and destructive personality, asks that we consider the inevitable answer to Duddy's own question of Jake Hersh in *St. Urbain's Horseman*: "How the hell could anyone love Duddy Kravitz?"

It seems obvious that, a decade apart (and perhaps for the last twenty years since *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* was first published), there are those who have shared the same negative response to Duddy and who interpret Richler's fourth novel as a solicitation of that response.³ However, attention must be paid to Richler's vision of Duddy in constant relation to those around him. In this relative vision, Richler has much sympathy for his "Jew-boy on the make." Despite his ignorance and crassness, Duddy is presented as a character it is possible to care about. This is so because Duddy's abilities and vulnerability are given unequivocal consideration while his destruction of self and others is not so conclusive. If it is not possible to love young Duddy Kravitz, it is possible to like, understand, and, perhaps, even forgive him.

What is very different and, therefore, somewhat disturbing, is the portrait of the young and adult Duddy in *St. Urbain's Horseman*. It is obvious in this novel that Richler himself no longer likes Duddy; in fact, he views Duddy as a character without redeeming qualities, and he would seem to sympathize with the views of the critics I have referred to. But, for the careful reader of *The Apprenticeship*, the Duddy in Jake Hersh's life is a distortion. It is difficult, if not impossible, for me to accept the apparent evolution of young Duddy into the vulgar, sex-obsessed Kravitz of *Horseman* (*apparent* because the evolution is unexplained). It can be said that Richler owes us no apologies or explanations; Duddy, after all, is his creation to do with as he pleases. However, despite his freedom in this regard, there does seem to be a missing novel about Duddy in

his twenties; without it an injustice has been done to a fictional character. There is no mysterious potion that Duddy drinks to be transformed; it is the writer's ink that is his lifeblood. In the portrait of Duddy that lifeblood is strong but palatable in *The Apprenticeship* and rather like the liquid in Irwin Shubert's scotch bottle in *Horseman*. If he was never only Dr. Jekyll, neither does Duddy deserve to be so entirely Mr. Hyde.

Richler's relative vision in *The Apprenticeship* begins with the confrontation between fifteen-year-old Duddy and his high-school teacher, Mr. MacPherson. We are not meant to admire Mr. MacPherson. He is a pathetic creature who evokes our pity because of his failure as a teacher and as a man. Nowhere is this dual failure better summarized than in the following passage that reveals MacPherson's attitude towards strapping:

Long ago Mr. MacPherson had vowed never to strap a boy. The principle itself, like the dream of taking Jenny on a trip to Europe, keeping up with the latest educational books, or saving to buy a house, was dead. But his refusal to strap was still of the greatest consequence. . . . That he no longer believed in strapping was beside the point. As long as he refused to do it Mr. MacPherson felt he would always land safely. There would be no crack-up. He would survive.

Duddy senses Mr. MacPherson's weakness and takes advantage of it: "Mac'll be a breeze. . . . He believes in *per*-suasion." However, Richler does not seem to want the reader to have much pity for Mr. MacPherson as far as his attitude towards Duddy is concerned. When MacPherson confronts Duddy in the schoolyard and orders him to put out his cigarette, Duddy replies that Max, his father, knows that he smokes. This is, perhaps, a lie, but what matters more is MacPherson's parental slur: "Then he's not fit to bring up a boy." Richler presents the ensuing snowball scene in a humorous light, with MacPherson, hit in the back of the neck by Duddy's snowball, "knitting his eyebrows in an attempt at ferocity." Similarly, Duddy is not revealed as a malicious boy intent on hurting MacPherson. Duddy means to hit Hersh, as is emphasized not only by Hersh's derogatory remark about Duddy's aim but also by Samuel's "Mighty neat, anyway." Duddy's James Cagney-like boast that "Nobody gets away with insulting my old man" is funny, and Mr. MacPherson, with his subsequent "vile" response and "distaste," is over-reacting.

Duddy, of course, is no intellectual match for Mr. MacPherson. He cannot spar and win with words. MacPherson defeats him easily on this level, too easily, and Duddy's insistence on staying in the ring and on his feet can be admired:

'Are you telling me what's fair?'
 'No, Sir. But why am I different from everybody else?'
 'I don't know, Kravitz. You tell me.'
 Mr. MacPherson smiled thinly. Everybody laughed.
 'Aw, Sir. Gee whiz.'

'This class may do anything it likes for the next period. I absolutely refuse to teach the likes of you.'

'Anything, Sir?'

....

'I'm not afraid to strap you, Kravitz. I don't believe in corporal punishment.'

'Sure.'

'Sir.'

'Sure, Sir.'

Duddy, no doubt, has *chutzpa*, but his iconoclastic role against authority and convention that hide bad teaching, social and cultural poverty, and anti-Semitism, is emphasized. Duddy and the boys have to survive not only MacPherson's limitations but "an endless repetition of precious peeling balconies and waste lots," as well as Mr. Feeney's crass comments about the Jews. Without Duddy, one feels, authority and convention would never be tested. That Duddy is not just a Jewish boy against a *goy* world is evident when he leads attacks on the Christian mission *and* the rabbinical students.

Before he describes Duddy's part in the death of Mrs. MacPherson, Richler provides some insight into Duddy's emotional condition. His romantic stories of his fictitious brother Bradley disguise the inadequacies of his home life:

His father was out, but he found his brother Lennie in the bedroom.

'Hi.'

'Duddy,' Lennie said, 'how many times have I asked you not to barge in here when I'm studying?'

Duddy's face flushed.

When Lennie refuses to respond to Duddy's obvious need for communication, Duddy can only awkwardly spill out his feelings for his brother: "'You don't have to worry about your fees next year. I'm going to get a job as a waiter up north for the summer and you can have all my tips.' Embarrassed, he fled." His father, Max, thinks of Duddy as a dope like himself, and offers him no support. When Duddy is proud of his father for being a pimp all Max can do is strike him. Unable to get any emotional sustenance from his immediate family, Duddy is afraid to be open with the rest of the world. The inhabitants of that world he sees, with much justification, as "carp-artists." But his insight and his vulnerability are never equal; as he cries to the teasing Jane Cox, "'Oh, will you leave me alone? Will you please leave me alone?'"

This, then, is the boy, a survivor in a harsh world, who gives Mr. MacPherson "the treatment." Duddy does make the phone call that seems to result in Mrs. MacPherson's death, *seems to* because Richler does not ever explain the exact cause of her demise. Richler does emphasize two things — Mr. MacPherson's responsibility in the matter and Duddy's subsequent guilt. MacPherson's drunken self-pity results in his wife having to answer the phone; his inadequacy as a

teacher and as a man result in the phone call in the first place. Duddy is not blameless, certainly; perhaps in a legal sense, were he not a minor, he could be considered guilty of manslaughter. But the point is that Duddy *is* a minor and, therefore, more of a victim than a perpetrator of events. When MacPherson, in the middle of his breakdown, accuses Duddy of killing his wife, Duddy's response to his buddies — “‘We're all in this together, you understand’” — includes, in Richler's scheme, MacPherson, the other teachers, Max and Lennie, indeed the whole St. Urbain Street milieu. We see Duddy as affected by what has happened and greatly in need of some emotional contact in the last meeting between Duddy and his adversary:

Mr. MacPherson stopped short when he noticed Kravitz and the others idling outside Felder's store. *The boys seemed subdued and unsure of themselves. Duddy started to walk towards him,* but then he apparently changed his mind, for he turned around to rejoin the boys.

'Kravitz.'

Duddy stopped.

'You'll go far, Kravitz. You're going to go very far.'

(Italics mine)

Duddy's walk towards Mr. MacPherson is an emotional gesture. That he can't complete it is not because he doesn't want to but because he is afraid of rebuff. It is a small thing, perhaps, but to Duddy's credit that he does not reply to MacPherson's final taunt.

Soon after we meet Simcha and Uncle Benjy. Simcha is the man whom Duddy will supposedly betray (at the end of the novel) along with Virgil and Yvette. Richler emphasizes from the beginning that wise, old grandfather Kravitz “was not loved” even though he is respected. Simcha's pride is also evident, and his inflexibility when his son produces no offspring. Simcha does show Duddy some kindness, but it is at the expense of Benjy and Max. The advice Simcha offers to his grandson — “‘A man without land is a nobody’” — has its matrix in the same narrow perception of life that causes Duddy to accept it as a truth. Later, when the Boy Wonder tells Duddy that Simcha never wanted any land, that he only wanted to dream about having it, Dingleman's words hurt Duddy because, for a moment, he sees his credo as the platitude it really is. How much, we might well ask, does Simcha betray Duddy?

Benjy, in his emotional deprivation, is like his nephew; he is also an iconoclast of sorts. Yet, in Richler's world, these two with the greatest potential for a relationship cannot help each other. As with MacPherson, and with his grandfather, Duddy cannot really be expected to assist his uncle. He tries to make contact with the adult world when he reports to Benjy about the stealing in the cutting-room. But Benjy is incapable of explaining anything; it is Duddy, even in his aggressiveness and ignorance, who taps the emotional vein:

'You're some kid, Duddy, some kid, but this much you ought to know. If you ever do anything to hurt your grandfather I'll break every bone in your body.'
'How come you care so much? You never even go to visit him anymore.'

Richler allows Duddy to judge those around him, those who are eventually hurt by Duddy. The judgements count as much as the pain. Meanwhile, Uncle Benjy protects himself through business, and Duddy will do the same.

CLEARLY, DUDDY IS SUPERIOR to Irwin Shubert. The leader of the St. Urbain Street pack has moved, at Rubin's hotel, beyond his familiar territory. Duddy is, as Mr. MacPherson was in the classroom, an outsider; but our sympathies lie with Duddy because his crudities are preferable to Irwin's nastiness and snobbery. Richler emphasizes that Duddy is not consciously out to hurt anyone when Duddy catches Irwin masturbating late one night:

Irwin looked up, startled and pale. Duddy grinned, he winked, and gesturing enthusiastically he said, 'Atta boy, Irwin. Whew! Pull!'

Duddy is neither condemning Irwin nor laughing at him; rather he is sharing in Irwin's pleasure "enthusiastically." Irwin's guilt and social shame at being caught by Kravitz prompt him to conscious retaliation. In contrast to Duddy, Irwin is malicious — the scotch bottle full of urine and the dirty talk about Yvette (" 'She's got gonorrhoea' ") prove it. While Irwin plots to cheat Duddy out of his hard-earned money, Duddy befriends another outsider, Cuckoo Caplan. He helps Cuckoo out of his depressions, encourages him in his professional ambitions, and does trust Cuckoo; it is a trust that is later betrayed.

Of course, despite his vulnerability and undeserved rebuffs, Duddy is becoming an unattractive hustler and money-grubber. He wants the other half of the one-hundred dollar bill that Mr. Farber offers him for good service. Also, "He [has] his heroes," and they are firmly rooted in the American success story, commercial wizards all. But the men behind Coca-Cola, Toni Home Permanent, and Reader's Digest are Richler's satirical targets as much as is Duddy's attraction to the questionable business ethic. Despite the power of the almighty dollar, Duddy cannot entirely reject his own roots. He says that " 'Yvette's a dime a dozen,' " but he does seek her out at the back of the hotel because this run-down area reminds him of home.

In Duddy's relationship with Yvette, Richler is primarily concerned with Duddy's need for the girl, a need that is abused and denied yet, in Duddy's own way, accepted. Although Duddy, from the beginning, does not seem to deserve Yvette, she obviously, like his Uncle Benjy later, sees something worth saving and loving in this boy who never stands still. Duddy does go out with Linda Rubin; he is so oblivious to the set-up that his preference for the rich hotel-owner's

daughter is mitigated by the reader's detestation of the Irwin-Linda arrangement. Duddy is a fool to risk his summer's earnings at the roulette wheel, but he is so much the underdog that it is difficult not to cheer him on. Duddy may be a hustler, but Richler makes it plain that he is operating in a hustling world that deserves everything it gets. To reject Duddy when he doubles his money at the expense of the generous guests is to miss Richler's relative perception of the apprentice in the masters' arena. No better illustration of such perception is offered than Duddy's justified, inner speech to Linda Rubin after he has lost at roulette:

Look at me, he thought, take a good look because maybe I'm dirt now. Maybe I've never been to Paris and I don't know a painter from a horse's ass. I can't play tennis like the other guys here, but I don't go around spilling ketchup in other guy's beds either. I don't trick guys into crazy promises when they're drunk. I don't speak dirty like you either. You make fun of your father. You don't like him. Tough shit. But he sends you to Europe and Mexico. . . . You're sorry for making a fool out of me. Gee whiz, my heart bleeds. Take a good look you dirty bitch. Maybe I'm dirt today. That bastard of a black marketeer Cohen can give me twenty bucks and a lecture about gambling and feel good for a whole week. But you listen here, kiddo. It's not always going to be like this. If you want to bet on something then bet on me.

Later on, Richler will allow Duddy to articulate similar feelings to his dying Uncle Benjy, and there, too, his accusations and perceptions will stand up. The reader should realize that Richler's arena is filled with blind masters and that Duddy is, in contrast, the one-eyed apprentice. This does not excuse his selfish use of Yvette when she takes him to the lake for the first time. Again, though, Richler draws an important distinction between the conscious and unconscious act of deception. Duddy watches the lake over Yvette's shoulder as he makes love to her, but "He had come to think he was alone." While this may seem like blindness, especially considering Duddy's lack of awareness of the woman beneath him, Duddy has one eye open on other, *human* matters: "On the far side there was a farm reserved for his grandfather." Duddy may not love Yvette at this time, but he does love Simcha.

Duddy is always presented, along with his values, in the company of others whose values demand judgment as well. "You can't run before you learn how to walk," an American television man tells him, so Duddy learns how to walk by looking about him and from contacts like Mr. Cohen. Cohen, in their haggling about Duddy's first *bar-mitzvah* film, teaches Duddy the give-and-take (but mostly 'take') of hard business bargaining. Then he advises Duddy on how to con another prospective customer: "'Tell him I'm paying you two thousand. . . . Don't trust him. Get five hundred down and the rest in writing. . . .' Duddy drove for fifteen minutes before he figured out he had no advance and nothing in writing from Mr. Cohen." While Duddy continues to underestimate Yvette in

his life, his *chutzpa* and his success with Dudley Kane Enterprises cannot be denied. Richler has not yet begun to question the price of Duddy's success in human terms. The reader should be careful when the questioning does begin since, like so much else in this novel, it is not orthodox.

Duddy also has the Boy Wonder as an example. Jerry Dingleman should not be anyone's hero; he is a spiritual as well as a physical cripple, and the reader certainly does not want Duddy to become like him. But, again, Richler points to the difference between a moral innocent, an unconscious hustler, on the one hand, and an immoral, if minor godfather-figure on the other. Duddy is cynically used by Dingleman as a drug carrier and, on a lesser level, as an entertaining diversion in New York City. The boy who risks jail unknowingly for a fifty dollar fee and a five hundred dollar loan, who can see no connection between his own life and that portrayed in *Death of A Salesman*, definitely lacks the withered humanity of the Boy Wonder.

DUDDY MEETS VIRGIL and the events begin to unfold that lead to Duddy's supposed self-destruction and the destruction of others. While the Duddy-Yvette-Virgil triangle can be looked at independently, Duddy's two trips on behalf of his family do occur while he seems to be most using and betraying his lover and friend.

Although Duddy is at the height of his material success, the *bar-mitzvah* film propelling him forward as an "indie," he does not hesitate when it comes to family trouble. Blood ties are extremely significant to Duddy; the sacrifices he makes because of these ties, the care and unabashed love he has for his family emphasize once more that it is ignorance rather than intent that rules in his relationship with Yvette and his exchanges with others such as Virgil and Mr. Friar. Lennie, a brother, needs help, so Duddy acts. As with the Irwin-Linda partnership, Duddy takes on power and money when he invades Hugh Thomas Calder's Westmount home. His innocence when he is out of his depth is not only funny but appealing: "'Jeez,' Duddy said aloud, getting out of his car. He had been in Westmount before . . . but never this high up. . . . Duddy thought of slipping the butler a fin. That, he thought, is what Falcon would have done." Of course, Irwin is involved in Lennie's troubles, and Irwin's nastiness is pernicious as he uses Lennie's medical expertise to further his own social standing. *Nothing* Duddy does compares with Irwin's conscious manipulation of human lives — Sandra's literally and Lennie's as far as his career is concerned. Duddy as an outsider in Westmount comes off well compared to the bored, cynical Mr. Calder who is also an experimenter with the lives of others. There is some moral force in Duddy's outburst to Mr. Calder, a moral force crudely expressed perhaps, but as

potent as it was in the earlier, inner speech to Linda Rubin and as it will be in the later speech, spoken aloud, to his Uncle Benjy:

'I'm trying to be fair.'

'Sure. Sure you are. Sandra's expelled and she comes home to this Yankee Stadium here and for all I know she can sleep in a different bedroom every night. That Andy Simpson goes home and sits on his ass until his father croaks and he inherits enough money to choke two horses. But what about my brother . . . ?'

Lennie has received all the breaks in the Kravitz family because he is Uncle Benjy's favourite, and it is plain he gets another break by having Duddy as his brother. Although Lennie has the college education, Duddy has another education — that of the streets. He is much sharper than his older brother, getting Lennie to tell him what he wants to know and advising Lennie as if it is he, Duddy, who has the extra years: "You're twenty-four years old. Don't you know better than to go bareback?" People are always accusing Duddy of something — of aggressiveness, selfishness, dishonesty — and Lennie, in Toronto, is no different. But his accusation that Duddy has "no code of honour," however valid, rings hollow beside Duddy's more insightful and accurate remark, "'You're the Number I Sucker of All Time.'" Although Lennie shouts about Duddy's greed, cannot see Duddy's own need for emotional comfort (with his questions about their mother), and laments his lost summer in Maine — in short, does not deserve Duddy — Duddy does, as he says to his father, "'bring 'em back alive.'" The reader cannot like Duddy's treatment of Yvette on his return to Montreal ("'People fall in love,' Yvette said. . . . 'Planes crash too,' Duddy said"); but the reader can applaud, or should, Duddy's justice for Irwin and his loyalty to his family.

Duddy, in going to New York to fetch Aunt Ida home for dying Uncle Benjy, travels far past the call of duty. At this point the complexity of Duddy's own condition is evident as Friar runs off and as Duddy continues to underestimate his need for Yvette, risking her loss as a result. He does reveal something of his inner fears and turmoil when he says about Benjy, "'He's going to die, Yvette. Isn't that terrible?'" Although Duddy abuses and taunts Yvette, this statement about death demands attention and, significantly, Richler offers no record of Yvette or anyone else solacing Duddy.

Duddy does show an amazing ability to get to the heart of the matter in a few words. First he urges his *zeyda* to "forgive and forget" his differences with Benjy; then, when Duddy arrives in New York and finds the fragile Ida balking at the thought of return to Montreal, he says to her, "'He's your husband and he's dying.'" His insight into himself and others on an emotional and spiritual level is limited, but someone else might not give the pathetic Ida the treatment she deserves as a human being; Duddy tries to talk to her on the train and he does offer solace.

In Duddy's final meeting with his uncle, Richler once more grants Duddy his simple but valid perception of the way things are. It is a perception that is, as usual, bound up with an emotional vulnerability:

'I'll be generous. Max is not very bright. I can't change that with my talk one way or another.

'You're very bright and nobody likes you. I'm sorry, Uncle Benjy. I say things I don't mean. It's just you make me so sore sometimes. . . .'

Sadly, Benjy and his nephew continue to joust verbally and they will never be able to embrace, despite their extreme and mutual need, in Benjy's lifetime. In the following exchange, Richler presents a succinct view of Duddy held by Benjy and perhaps by the majority of readers. However, Duddy, in reply, is allowed to articulate his world-view. It is an articulation that expands the dying Benjy's vision of the boy he has previously rejected, and it should expand the reader's vision as well:

'Why didn't you ever have time for me?'

'Because you're a *pusherke*. A little Jew-boy on the make. Guys like you make me sick and ashamed.'

'You lousy intelligent people. You lying sons of bitches with your books and your socialism and your sneers. You give me one long pain in the ass. . . . *Pusherkes*. What a bunch you are! What a pack of crap-artists! Writing and reading books that make fun of people like me. Guys who want to get somewhere. If you're so concerned, how come in real life you never had time for me? It's easy for you to sit here and ridicule and make superior little jokes because you know more than me, but what about a helping hand? When did you ever put yourself out one inch for me? Never. It's the same with all you intelligent people. . . . You never take your hands out of your pockets to a guy like me except when it's got a knife in it. You think I should be running after something else besides money? Good. Tell me what. Tell me you bastard. I want some land, Uncle Benjy. I'm going to own my own place one day. King of the castle, that's me. And there won't be any superior *drecks* there to laugh at me or run me off. That's just about the size of it.

That is just about the size of it. Duddy is allowed to speak with some authority and justification, to answer back a world that has formed and cheated him, that has given him his crass values. The amazing thing is that, as Uncle Benjy realizes, there are still some qualities in Duddy that are admirable:

'You're such a nervy kid. My God, Duddel, you're even touchier than Lennie. . . . You don't want anything from me. Come to think of it, you're the only one in the family who never came here to ask for something. My God, it never occurred to me before. You're the only one, Duddel. I've been unfair to you.'

If the reader has been paying attention, he has recognized Duddy's worth for quite a while, especially in comparison to others. The point is not, as Uncle Benjy emphasizes in his last letter to Duddy, that Duddy has "to choose" between being "a scheming little bastard . . . and the fine, intelligent boy underneath. . . ."

The point is, surely, that “the fine, intelligent boy” has endured while the “scheming little bastard” has struggled to survive. Duddy is alone in this world, especially before death: “‘Don’t let him die. . . . He’s my uncle.’ And then embarrassed he fled the house.” Uncle Benjy can ask for morphine when the pain starts; there is no drug for Duddy’s pain. The “grating amoral force” is not Duddy but life itself.

DUDDY AND VIRGIL ARE SIMILAR in some ways. Virgil responds to Duddy’s cliché about business, “‘Necessity is the mother of all invention.’” Although Duddy never tells Virgil that “A man without land is a nobody,” it is obvious that Virgil would accept such words as gospel; he is fond of his own platitudes: “‘You know, Mr. Kravitz, life is no bowl of cherries for a guy like me.’” Richler does seem, however, to insist on Virgil’s true moral innocence and to place Duddy in some opposition to this. As they prepare to go to sleep on Virgil’s first night in Ste. Agathe, Virgil says, “‘Look, everything’s covered with snow outside. . . . I want to be the first person to walk in it. The first in the world.’” There is a child-like ingenuousness about Virgil that Duddy, for all his ignorance, lacks. Almost immediately after Virgil’s response to the snow, Duddy drives to the lake and his land, and the winter is his enemy:

It’s lovely, he thought, and lots of those pine trees I can peddle at Christmas time. . . . It’s my land, he thought. But the wind began to cut quicker across the fields, suddenly the sun went out like a light . . . and Duddy began to shiver. . . . Duddy was able to trace his footsteps until the snow began to fall again, and then he was in bad trouble. . . . He ran and ran to no purpose until he collapsed panting in the snow.

Despite this contrast and Duddy’s ability to manipulate Virgil over the job and truck, Duddy is innocent of any real knowledge of epilepsy and certainly less informed than Virgil in this regard:

‘Do you . . . em . . . have these fits in your sleep very often?’
 ‘A couple of times a week. They’re not very severe.’

Virgil tells Duddy not to worry about his fits, and Yvette, when she discovers Virgil is an epileptic, protests the truck-driving job but seems to want to pass off the responsibility: “‘I’ll never forgive you if anything happens to him. I swear it.’” All of Yvette’s energy goes into making sure that Virgil gets a fair deal for the truck; the reader is left to wonder why *she* doesn’t question Virgil about his attacks. Obviously Virgil has driven before; he is also very sensitive about his condition and never tries to deny it. Certainly Duddy takes advantage of Virgil in business terms, but Yvette seems to think that is settled when Duddy returns the extra truck money.

When Duddy asks Yvette, at the end of Part II of the novel, having acquired half the land in six months, “ ‘What’s your opinion of Duddy Kravitz now?’ ” the *chutzpa* and the business sense are still worthy of applause. So, too, are Duddy’s actions on behalf of his family. If his continued insensitivity to Yvette and his newer callousness about Virgil do grate, such behaviour is only part of a complex whole.

Virgil’s accident occurs on the heels of Duddy’s final words to his dying uncle. Ironically, Duddy’s lashing out grants Benjy some insight, a new perception in his last days. In similar terms, although Virgil is paralysed, his life is changed, as Virgil insists, for the better. Duddy is not insensitive to another’s dying — we have seen his pain and confusion with Benjy; but perhaps he has to shut down, for self-protection, the emotional response to what has happened to Virgil. In the exchange at the hospital between Duddy and Yvette, her fixing the blame *entirely* on Duddy is not justified. He cannot be blamed for Virgil’s accident, at least not any more than Yvette and, really, Virgil himself. Yvette’s martyr-like assumption of responsibility for the care of the paralysed Virgil suggests that she does perceive the blame as shared. She presumes to judge Duddy; however, Richler undermines the validity of her righteous vision. Duddy’s defense is impersonal, but it contains as much truth as Yvette’s accusations :

‘I want to know all the details. You’re not going to get off easy.’

....

‘He was happy on the job. I didn’t force it on him.’

‘You knew it was dangerous. I warned you.’

‘Crossing the street is dangerous. You’ve got to live. A guy takes chances.’

‘There’s no getting around it. You’re to blame.’

Although Duddy is trying to avoid responsibility, his words about ‘crossing the street’ are not tossed off lightly. The street is St. Urbain, and a guy must take chances to cross it and to escape it. A good part of Duddy’s philosophy and experience of life is contained in this seemingly callous series of statements. Can Duddy be blamed for Virgil’s emotional insecurity that certainly played a part in the accident?

Virgil’s fits had begun again when Duddy asked him to move downstairs into Yvette’s apartment. He had understood, he said, that Duddy and Yvette wanted to be together. . . . but the fits began again.

That Duddy’s tough-guy philosophy about taking chances is not seamless, that he does suffer from his own emotional and spiritual insecurities, for which he receives no succour, is emphasized by his breakdown. The accident and Yvette’s subsequent departure with Virgil are the direct causes, but his terrible loneliness during the breakdown, his pathetic yet very funny attempts at self-mythologizing, his search for the past through Hersh, and his admittance of guilt over Mr. and

Mrs. MacPherson reveal an inner void in Duddy that transcends the immediate situation. Duddy is primarily a victim rather than a manipulator of life. That he is sensitive enough not only to remember MacPherson but also to carry around within him his part in MacPherson's downfall indicates that Duddy is much more than "undirected drive and aggression." Indeed, when one recognizes how much emotional energy Duddy expends in his search for his mother, his need for love from Max and Benjy, and his guilt about the past, Duddy's distancing of Virgil can be better understood. In Duddy's disturbed and dark vision "A leering Mr. MacPherson waited around every corner. . . . He tried to run, he wept for trying so hard, but his legs wouldn't work." It is nonsense to suggest that a leering Virgil isn't somewhere just below the surface. When Duddy meets Hersh and accepts responsibility for Mrs. MacPherson's death, he is doing what Yvette implies that he is incapable ever of doing — Duddy is saying *mea culpa* for it all: "Duddy began to cry. . . . He rested his head against the steering wheel and stared at the clutch."

Duddy is at rock-bottom, dangerously close to snapping completely. We cannot expect him to survive for long in this *mea culpa* position. Like Virgil, Duddy must start over. It is ironic but inevitable that he learns to walk again from Mr. Cohen. Cohen understands the rules of the game as Yvette does not. "‘Make yourself hard,’" he advises Duddy and insists that if he had to he would cut the throat of his nearest and dearest customer. In order to pick up the pieces of his dream, Duddy does make himself hard, but not easily. Richler's main question seems to be this: In a world of throat-cutters does Duddy Kravitz pick up and use the knife?

DUDDY IS ONLY \$4500 AWAY from having all the land. Previously, Yvette has asked one or two questions about his remarkable ability to come up with necessary payments, but she has never queried Duddy very closely on this. In fact, she has been his ally in the acquisition of the land, lending her name to the deeds and providing him with the vital information about the sellers. She is concerned about his health, not so much about his methods: "‘. . . I don't want you to start running again. I couldn't stand it.’" When Duddy is slowing down and resting with Yvette and Virgil at Ste. Agathe, when he has virtually given up his dream of owning the entire property, it is Yvette who informs him the final parcel of land is up for sale. It is Yvette who tells him why Dingleman has not yet bought the last piece of property, and it is Yvette who saves Duddy's chances by warning him "‘There's something else . . . we have to put up three hundred dollars option money tomorrow morning. Have you got it?’" She is encouraging Duddy to hope; she is telling him to start running again.

It is important to realize how Duddy goes about acquiring the money he needs. A moral distinction exists between those who help him and those who do not. The corrupt Boy Wonder reduces Duddy to begging but won't deliver, and Hugh Thomas Calder, in his spiritual malaise, cannot see beyond his ground rules for a relationship with the slum-boy. Mr. Cohen does help Duddy, Mr. Cohen the throat-cutter, a man who will lend money only if he can make money in return; but he is also the man who saved Duddy from Irwin's plotting at Rubin's and, like his methods or not, he is the one who gave Duddy the necessary boost upwards and out of his self-pity and emotional crisis. With his Yiddish expressions and ability to see something in Duddy beyond his own need for him, Mr. Cohen ranks higher on the moral scale than either Calder or Dingleman. Meanwhile, Duddy's quality is emphasized in his exchange with Lennie. Lennie does rightfully praise Duddy as "some brother," but it is Duddy's own comment that should cause us to consider how he is much more than a *pusherke*: " 'It's hard to be a gentleman — a Jew, I mean — it's hard to be. Period.' " Little Jew-boys solely on the make don't think such things, let alone say them.

Although it is money that finally brings Duddy and his father together, the tentative and disguised emotional give-and-take between father and son outweighs the value of the dollar sign:

'Duddy would like to borrow some money, Daddy.'

'Who wouldn't? Max reached into the kitchen drawer for his backscratcher. 'Money,' he said, 'is the root of all evil. In olden times they used the barter system. I favour it.'

Duddy grinned in spite of himself. Standing behind his father he reached out to touch him. Gently, however, almost surreptitiously, just in case he moved away.

Max lends Duddy a thousand dollars and Duddy is only \$2200 away from achieving his dream. Time is running out, however, especially as Dingleman is after the remaining parcel of land. It is the decision of Yvette that pushes Duddy to his one consciously dishonest act.

Virgil has been paralysed for life that he might find his life. He has never been happier than when he is editing his newspaper for epileptics, something that would not have come about without the accident. Virgil does not blame Duddy for his paralysis, and his continuing love for Duddy is certain. Furthermore, Virgil, on his own, would lend Duddy the \$2200:

'Does Duddy need more money?' Virgil asked.

'Don't say a word,' Yvette said.

'But —'

'You heard me, Virgil.'

Yvette does control Virgil as is evident when Duddy tries to cajole him into lending the money. Virgil does not break down and sob just because Duddy is

pressuring him; he does so because his loyalty is torn between Duddy and Yvette. It is at this point that Yvette's position must be questioned.

Yvette has worked with Duddy a long time to get the land. She knows the fanatical devotion he has to his dream; she has been privy to how hard he has pushed himself and others in his quest for the lake property. Does she set Duddy up for a test by leaving him alone in the house with Virgil's easily-accessible cheque-book? Perhaps it can be said quickly in her defense that she never expects Duddy to stoop to forgery. Why? The answer can be only that Yvette, who does possess a moral integrity of her own, senses the same thing somewhere in Duddy; she realizes that for all his hustle he has never been overtly dishonest. On the other hand, Yvette, who still holds a grudge against Duddy for his treatment of Virgil, should recognize that Duddy cannot afford to stop so short of his goal. She should recognize that she has encouraged him, with her news about the last section of land, not to stop. She does not look at Virgil's cheque-book when Duddy announces that he has the money, but she is an accomplice in the forgery whether she admits it or not.

Duddy knows what he does is wrong. He rationalizes and delays, but he does finally steal from Virgil. His guilt is obvious when Virgil, the forged cheque made known, has his worst fit; it is a guilt that includes more than Virgil:

Virgil lay twisted on the floor beside his overturned wheelchair. . . . Above him the telephone receiver dangled loosely. . . . Duddy ran, he ran, he ran.

The link with Mrs. MacPherson's death is obvious. Just as others, besides Duddy, played a part in her demise, Duddy is not alone as far as the responsibility for Virgil's decline is concerned. The forgery is the one act for which he will not be forgiven by the two people who mean the most to him — Yvette and Simcha. Richler has already caused the reader to question Yvette's righteous stance; neither is the *zeyda* meant to be the final moral judge of his grandson.

The price that Duddy pays for owning his land is high. He is allowed his sweet victory over the Boy Wonder, but he loses his grandfather's love. Yet, if Duddy is guilty of various misdeeds, no one is innocent in Richler's world. If what Simcha says to Duddy is true — “ ‘You'll settle your conscience and go out and swindle others’ ” — then Duddy's retort is also valid:

‘You don't twist either. You don't want to farm. You never have. . . . You couldn't even go to see Uncle Benjy before he died. Naw, not you. You're just too goddam proud to live.’

Duddy is, as he says, “all alone”; he has been isolated as well as having isolated himself. In the final exchange between Duddy and Yvette, Duddy's rationalizations and explanations don't wash; but he is allowed one statement of conviction in the midst of his defensive ravings. This statement is vital in our ultimate assessment of Duddy:

He gave her an anguished look, started to say something, swallowed, shook his fist and said, his voice filled with wrath, 'I have to do everything alone. I can see that now. I can trust nobody.'

'We betrayed you, I suppose.'

'Yes. You did.'

He had spoken with such quiet conviction and certainty that she began to doubt herself. (Italics mine)

This doubt should affect the reader-judge as well. It is as important, if not more so, as Duddy's subsequent glee at being able to mark his bill.

According to Max, the Boy Wonder is dead, long live the Boy Wonder! Duddy is broke and alone, the legend Max builds about him is shoddy, and Duddy's last words in the novel — "'You see' " — emphasize his limitations. But he is now, as he has always been, a survivor whose energy and vulnerability remain attractive and whose essential lack of pessimism and malice remains unsullied. Richler has attempted to make the reader care about Duddy. Until 1966, at least, it is a good bet that readers of Canadian fiction wondered what became of Duddy Kravitz more than they did about any other character.

DUDDY'S ROLE IN THE FIRST THIRD of *St. Urbain's Horseman* (1972) is as a contemporary of Jake Hersh at Fletcher's Field High School. He is the Duddy of the Mr. MacPherson era (although MacPherson is never mentioned), the kid with *chutzpa*, the iconoclast. This is Jake's story, but Jake, in some ways, reminds us of the appealing Duddy we once knew. His need to romanticize Cousin Joey recalls Duddy's need to create the romance of his 'older brother' Bradley. Jake's self-aggrandizement is hilarious, as are his day-dreams about his death and the pain it would cause others. Duddy had the same kind of fantasies. Jake's exchange with a Montreal waiter brings Duddy to mind, the ingenuous Duddy who asserted himself through platitude:

Back in Montreal Jake made straight for the bar in Central Station, ordered a double whiskey and paid for it with American money.

'Montreal is the Paris of North America,' the waiter said. 'I trust you will enjoy your stay, sir.'

Jake stared at his change. 'What's this,' he asked, 'monopoly money?'

'It's Canadian.'

Jake laughed, pleased.

'Canada's no joke. We're the world's leading producer of uranium. Walter Pidgeon was born in this country.'

This Duddy, however, is no more. Seen through the eyes of Jake, Duddy is never vulnerable, only crude. Where in his apprenticeship does Duddy sound like this? "'Everybody's doin' it, doin' it . . . pickin' their nose and chewin' it, chewin' it.'" Jake's cousin Herky manufactures liquid soap and other toiletries;

the young Duddy once sold such articles to raise money for Dudley Kane Productions. Whatever happened to Duddy Kravitz? Herky, in his interests and ignorance might sound like Duddy, but his fervent speeches about urinals and toilets are a parody of the St. Urbain Street hustler: “‘It’s from the Stone Ages here. You know what they got in the urinals? Ice cubes.’ The roadhouse was not one of Herky’s clients. ‘This isn’t a toilet, it’s a storage tank for last week’s farts. Take a deep breath, kid.’” In case this comparison between Herky and Duddy be considered too tenuous, the other brief portraits of the young Kravitz can be seen to support it. Let Duddy speak for himself:

‘Hey, sypthead,’ he shouted up at Joey, ‘make you a deal. You burp up my ass and I’ll fart in your mouth.’

* * *

When the boys whirled around, Duddy, clutching his genitals, shouted, ‘*Votre soeur, combien?*’ . . . Duddy bent over, pulled down his trousers, and wiggled his pale narrow white ass in the air. ‘For Pope Pius,’ he hollered.

The kid who remained so loyal to his family despite emotional deprivation, the street-wise kid who learned to survive and who was easy to root for when in conflict with an Irwin Shubert, the boy who was allowed to articulate his vision against those of Linda Rubin and Uncle Benjy — this Duddy is gone forever. “The fine, intelligent boy” that Uncle Benjy glimpsed is dead; he has become more than a “scheming little bastard.” Duddy paid a price at the end of his apprenticeship, but such was Richler’s relative vision that there still seemed to be some hope for Duddy. Not any more. Richler, in *St. Urbain’s Horseman*, seems to be determined to destroy Duddy in the reader’s eyes. The character Duddy most resembles in this novel is the pathetic, even despicable Harry Stein.

Jake meets the adult Duddy in Toronto at the apartment of his cousin Jenny; it is twenty years after Yvette and Virgil. There is no explanation as to why Jenny is with Duddy, and their sexual exchange seems to be used by Richler to portray the absence of *any* Kravitz sensitivity or feelings: “They lunched together once a week and then retired to his apartment on Avenue Road, where he mounted her absently, eliciting an orgasm in time to shower before his next appointment.” Duddy’s old hustle is still good for a story or two. He puts the touch on Jake for a few dollars and he dreams up the *Canadian Jewish Who’s Who*, a project that will launch him on his millionaire path. The mad groundwork of the “*Jew’s Who*” and its eventual success remind one of the *bar-mitzvah* films, the first Dudley Kane efforts; however, there is no land at the end of the rainbow, no loyalty to a grandfather’s advice, just the greedy man’s pot of gold. The relative vision is absent in this mini-portrait of Duddy; so when he cheats his Wate-Loss partner into buying out his shares of a pill that contains tape-

worm, there are no excuses. Duddy is empty and without attraction; the reader cannot care about a *pusherke* without a soul.

Sometime later, Duddy, who is now married, finds Jake in London and Richler sets up the reader for a question that was never asked during the apprenticeship but which must, apparently, be asked now.

'Duddy, what are you doing in London?'

'Launching a star. I've got to speak to you.'

'All right, then. What are you doing right now?'

'Masturbating. And you?'

* * *

'Oh I've had a hundred and ninety-two girls, not counting Marlene, and more than one has pleaded for me to stop. Big Dick one of the girls used to call me. Nice, huh? I liked that. Big Dick Kravitz. The girls tell me I'm a very virile guy and I don't come quick as a sneeze, like a lot of *shmecks* today.'

Duddy is preoccupied with sex and money; he can talk about little else. He is uninteresting and does little to advance the story of Jake. This treatment of Duddy is, of course, deliberate on Richler's part and far removed from the comparatively complex portrait of the younger days. When Duddy asks Jake, "Who in hell could love Duddy Kravitz?" readers unite in chorus and shout, as they are supposed to, "No one!" Not *this* Duddy Kravitz, at least.

Our last glimpse of Duddy comes right at the end of the novel, though his presence is gratuitous. Good old Duddy lends his pal Hersh \$10,000, but such a loan is emotion-free. There is more crude Kravitz talk about sex, so much and in such a way that one can only pity this limited perception of the world. It is as if the Duddy of the apprenticeship days has had a lobotomy; that part of his mind that once contained such positive human qualities as loyalty, sensitivity, vulnerability, and joy has been cut away. What is left is a slimy piece of gray matter that perceives the world in terms of dollar signs and fucking.

Early on in *St. Urbain's Horseman*, Jake reads from the diary of Reb Shmul Johnson. Jake applies the following words to himself; but the reader who has discovered what *did* happen to Duddy Kravitz might well speak these words on behalf of Duddy, offering them as a prayer, acting as a *Kaddish* for a lost soul, lost after the apprenticeship, not during:

'When I survey my past life, I discover nothing but a barren waste of time, with some disorders of the body and disturbances of the mind very near to madness, which I hope He that made me will suffer to extenuate many faults and exercise many deficiencies.'

Duddy is not mentioned in any of Richler's subsequent fiction, including the latest novel, *Joshua Then And Now*. But, from Richler's point of view, after *St. Urbain's Horseman* what remained to be said about him? Having chosen

not to write a novel, between 1959 and 1966, that would reveal Duddy moving and changing from adolescence to adulthood, Richler leaves such movement and change up to the reader. And this is where the conflict arises. If Dr. Jekyll never existed, Mr. Hyde emerges from a vacuum. The reader of *The Apprenticeship* cannot, based on the relative vision of that novel, jump to the repellent portrait of Duddy in *Horseman*. Duddy is forced to drink a potion (Richler's ink his life-blood) that most readers would never ask him to swallow and on which they gag themselves.

The final view of Duddy Kravitz is of an offensive and foul-mouthed millionaire. The lasting vision is of a boy confused and unrefined, but certainly appealing and with a potential for growth. Duddy Kravitz is alive and well and living on St. Urbain Street still.

NOTES

- ¹ A. R. Bevan, "Introduction," *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969).
- ² Kerry McSweeney, "Revaluing Mordecai Richler," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 5, No. 4 (Summer 1979), 131.
- ³ Warren Tallman, on the other hand, praises Duddy's "direct intelligence and colloquial exuberance." In "Wolf in the Snow," *Canadian Literature*, 6 (Autumn 1960), Tallman writes: "D. H. Lawrence contended that in the visions of art a relatively finer vision is substituted for the relatively cruder visions extant. But in North America . . . finer is relatively crude, because frequently untrue, and crude can be relatively fine. All too often, in fiction as in life, those pretensions which we seek out because they make us fine provide the false furnishings for the actual house in which we live. This fine is crude. Duddy, who would not know a pretension if he met one, wanders for this reason by accident and mostly unaware into the actual house. His crude is relatively fine."

**CANADIAN AUTHORS
PAPERBACKS
TEXTS**

available at

the bookstore

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
2075 WESBROOK PLACE
VANCOUVER, B.C. V6T 1W5 / 228-4741

