Irony and the Portrayal of Immigrant and Ethnic Protagonists in Canadian Fiction

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the uses of irony in the portrayal of six immigrant and ethnic protagonists and their relation to society. The discussion of The Rich Man, The Luck of Ginger Coffey, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and Under the Ribs of Death focuses on the divergence between the author's perceptions and the protagonist's. The analysis of Son of a Smaller Hero and Peace Shall Destroy Many centres on the diverging views of the protagonist and his limiting environment. The pairing of the novels corresponds to a progression in the attitude of the protagonists which permits the elaboration of an integrative vision in the last two novels analysed.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on a group of six novels that deal with aspects of the immigrant and ethnic experience. These works were written in the post-war years between 1948 and 1962. In the Literary History of Canada this period is characterized by Hugo McPherson as a period in which literature reflects the need for a greater awareness of the Canadian identity, and exhibits the impulse toward self-discovery.[1] The Rich Man by Henry Kreisel, The Luck of Ginger Coffey by Brian Moore, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and Son of a Smaller Hero by Mordecai Richler, Under the Ribs of Death by John Marlyn, and Peace Shall Destroy Many by Rudy Wiebe, share this tendency and chart a territory that had not really been explored before. This allowed certain members of the Canadian society to see themselves reflected in fiction that had hitherto largely ignored them. At the same time these novels reveal universal concerns through the presentation of the protagonist's interaction with the society around him.

The protagonists' experience in these works is viewed on an ironic plane. The protagonists are all self-

[1]Hugo McPherson, "Fiction: 1940-1960," Literary History of Canada, Second Edition, vol.2, Carl F. Klinck et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 219.

deluding in one way or another, and to various degrees. In The Rich Man Kreisel explores Jacob Grossman's erroneous self-perception as the rich man of the novel's title. The Luck of Ginger Coffey reveals the contradictions in Ginger's pose as adventurer and squire. Both Duddy Kravitz in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and Sandor Hunyadi in Under the Ribs of Death, believe they can acquire identity through material success. Noah Adler in Son of a Smaller Hero perceives himself as a lone crusader and thinks that he can totally do away with his past. In Peace Shall Destroy Many, Thom Wiens is loyal to a diminished concept of brotherhood, when the need for a broader view is evident. With the exception of Duddy and Sandor, these protagonists finally realize that they must change or adjust their perceptions and vision in order to belong to society.

Irony is generated in these novels "by the divergence between two realities in our fiction: that of the protagonist's perceptions and that of the author's, of the protagonist and his environment."[2] In The Rich Man, The Luck of Ginger Coffey, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and Under the Ribs of Death the focus is on the tension between the protagonist's viewpoint and the author's. This tension reveals and comments upon the protagonist's perception of himself and his interaction with society. It shows that the protagonist, through an erroneous or limited

[2]John Moss, Patterns of Isolation (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 198.

self-concept and vision of the world, isolates himself from what can potentially provide a positive thrust to his development. Jacob Grossman, in The Rich Man, is isolated from his family. Kreisel suggests that this isolation and Jacob's lack of understanding of such characters as his brother-in-law Albert and Albert's friend Koch, is a measure of the protagonist's alienation from his surroundings. Ginger Coffey, in The Luck of Ginger Coffey, is also alienated from his family. His selfish posturing prevents any significant contribution to the society that he has elected to come to. Sandor, in Under the Ribs of Death, and Duddy in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, isolate themselves from the people that most care about them through their single-minded attempts to gain financial success. Their interaction with society is limited because it is based on a superficial interpretation of life. In rejecting the values of the older generation, Sandor and Duddy "grasp at the most superficial and least worthy aspects of the new environment in order to gain a sense of belonging."[3]

Although some criticism is aimed at the protagonists in Son of a Smaller Hero and Peace Shall Destroy Many the main focus of these two novels is a critical presentation of the enclosed worlds of the Jewish ghetto and of the Mennonite community. Irony is generated here by the divergence between the protagonist's growing awareness

[3]Ruth McKenzie, "Notes on the Immigrant Theme," Canadian Literature 7 (Winter 1961): 24-33.

of the need for freedom and a wider vision and his environment's curtailing of the freedom that would make a wider vision possible. Both these works unveil the layers of duplicity and contradiction that protect the protagonist's limited environment. It is through this process that the protagonists achieve understanding. The key to this unveiling is the ironic portrayal of the patriarchal figure in each novel, Melech Adler in Son of a Smaller Hero and Deacon Block in Peace Shall Destroy Many.

Through the use of irony, the authors, while not neglecting the social and ethnic factors that impede the protagonists' progress, reveal that it is essentially the protagonists' own obstructed vision that immobilizes them. Entrapped in erroneous perceptions of themselves or in limiting views of life and society they are barred from meaningful contact with others.

A statement that Hugo McPherson makes in reference to fiction written between 1940 and 1960, informs the discussion of the six novels that will be analysed in this thesis. "Each of the works speaks less for a region or group than for individual and communal consciousness."[4] Kreisel, Moore, Marlyn, Richler and Wiebe, focus on the need for self-awareness and its necessity in self-development. Communal consciousness can be achieved only through self-knowledge and interaction with others. These authors pro-

[4]Hugo McPherson, "Fiction: 1940-1960," p. 219.

test the isolation that prevents their immigrant and ethnic protagonists from knowing themselves and their world. Their novels show us, whether it be through the final realization of the protagonist himself, through the example of life-affirming characters or through the unmasking process that irony provokes, that it is both possible and necessary for the protagonists to reject their isolation, and to embrace life and the world.

This thesis analyses The Rich Man, The Luck of Ginger Coffey, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, Under the Ribs of Death, Son of a Smaller Hero and Peace Shall Destroy Many in an effort to reveal the uses of irony in the portrayal of the immigrant and ethnic protagonists and their fragmented apprehension of society. The pairing of the works and the order of discussion correspond to a shifting attitudinal approach in the protagonists themselves.

Chapter I, entitled Delusions of Grandeur, examines The Rich Man and The Luck of Ginger Coffey in light of Kreisel's and Moore's deflation of the protagonists' illusions and mistaken self-perceptions. Reality is something to hide from for the protagonists in these novels.

Chapter II, The Urban Jungle, views the condemnation of materialistic values in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and Under the Ribs of Death in the context of what might be referred to as the urban novel. The protagonists in these two novels try to find a place in society

but are blinded by their false perceptions as to the method of achieving their goal.

Chapter III, An Apocalypse, explores the unveiling of duplicity and the distancing of the protagonist from a limiting environment in Son of a Smaller Hero and Peace Shall Destroy Many. Both Noah and Thom effect a more conscious searching and questioning of both themselves and their restricted milieu.

Chapter I

Delusions of Grandeur: The Rich Man and The Luck of Ginger Coffey

In The Rich Man and The Luck of Ginger Coffey the protagonists suffer a belated adolescence. Their approach to society is tainted by their illusions of prestige and success. Both Jacob Grossman and Ginger Coffey see themselves as they would like to be and not as they really are. Their existence is a precarious one in which reality can never live up to expectation. The 'Rich Man' is really a poor man for he is lacking in the elemental knowledge needed to enrich his life. Ginger Coffey is unlucky because his vision is clouded by dreams of grandeur.

Both Henry Kreisel and Brian Moore reveal the ironies implicit in their protagonists' disguises. A stripping away of illusion provokes a confrontation with the self. In both instances a dramatic event triggers a painful awakening of the dreamers. In Jacob's case it is the death of his brother-in-law. In Ginger's case it is the humiliating experience of jail and the courtroom. Through this awakening the protagonists are brought back into the mainstream of life and society and finally abandon their childhood and protective disguises. They have entered the adult world and are no longer alone.

In The Rich Man, Jacob Grossman's contact with the past allows him to understand his present. In returning to Europe, he gains an awareness of the importance of community and the need for involvement. This is achieved through his journey from innocence to knowledge and from self-delusion to self-discovery. In discussing the novel in an interview published in Sphinx, Henry Kreisel says, "In The Rich Man I tried to relate the Canadian experience to the European experience by taking an immigrant back to Europe and thus gaining a double view."[5] By exploring the two poles of Jacob's experience Kreisel reveals the ironies of his protagonist's existence and self-perception. Jacob is an uncertain guide to both worlds for he views one through a romantic haze and has chosen to isolate himself from the other. The discrepancy between dream world (Jacob's defences, his romantic and ideal view of himself and Vienna) and reality (the actual facts of his life and the impending tragedy that will engulf Europe) is central to the novel. It is sustained by various ironic juxtapositions that point to Jacob's lack of self-awareness and support the need to be part of life and the world as they are.

The theme of the imprisoned spirit that Kreisel

[5]Henry Kreisel, "Certain Worldly Experiences: An Interview with Henry Kreisel," by Felix Cherniavsky in Sphinx 7: 15.

considers dominant in prairie writing and illustrated in novels such as As for Me and My House, The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, Ballad of a Stone Picker, and in Frederick Philip Grove's and Martha Ostenso's work,[6] can also be found in his own novels. In The Betrayal, a history professor distances himself from the life around him through his academic and intellectualized viewpoint. In The Rich Man, Jacob is trapped by his illusions and his self-defensive pose. He is immobile, when everything around him is fluctuating and in movement.

Jacob's escapist tendencies are discussed in an article by Robert Lecker entitled "States of Mind." "The more we follow Jacob in his movements at home or overseas the more we realize the extent to which he has either denied his environment, or coloured his view of it so as to reinforce a contrived sense of security."[7] This is apparent from the very beginning of the novel when we observe Jacob's methodic and ritualistic preparations to go to work. In endlessly repeating the same gestures Jacob is reassured by the routine that he goes through every morning, a routine that leaves no place for the unexpected. The routine is not changed even though that particular morning he is preparing for a special day--he must ask his manager's

[6]Henry Kreisel, "The Prairie: A State of Mind," in Contexts of Canadian Criticism, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 265.

[7]Robert Lecker, "States of Mind: Henry Kreisel's Novels," Canadian Literature 77 (Summer 1978): 115.

permission to leave for Europe.

The theme of the imprisoned spirit is illustrated in Chapter One, as in the rest of the novel, by Jacob's tendency to shut out or ignore those aspects of reality that are inconvenient or unpleasant. As he shaves and prepares to leave for the factory, the radio plays a recording of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." Jacob does not pay much attention to it and only tunes in when "The Blue Danube" is being played.

> The Negro song is in fact much more suited to Jacob than the waltz--the never-changing form of his employment amidst 'the steam of the Hoffman presses and the sweat of hundreds of workers' marks him as enslaved to a system that reduces men to strictly mechanical activities.[8]

Jacob prefers to colour his view with the romantic strains of the waltz. The radio then presents a news bulletin. Among other items, Goering's paradoxical contention that rearmament is Germany's greatest contribution to world peace sets the scene for what will await Jacob in Europe, but Jacob is no longer listening to the radio. He is much too absorbed in his plans. Kreisel sets up one of the ironic juxtapositions that are frequent in the novel. Jacob is in his dream world while around him reality and tragedy unfold.

The Blue Danube Waltz is a recurring element in the novel and serves to underline the dichotomy between dream world and real world. While Jacob shaves, his favorite tune

[8]Robert Lecker, "States of Mind," p. 86.

is being played on the radio.

> It was a jazz version of the old tune, hammered out very fast and loud, all brass and drums. Jacob loved the waltz, but not when it was played like that. He wanted a lot of violins, hundreds of them, the way it was always done in movies about gay Vienna.[9]

It is highly significant that even in Vienna Jacob will never hear it played the way he prefers it. Jacob's version belongs to the fantasy world of Hollywood films. The Vienna that he visits, as he must discover, is the theatre of some very real and tragic incidents. Jacob's inability to comprehend why his version is never played is indicative of his inability to grasp the scope of the events that are taking place.

In Vienna Jacob encounters street musicians and is enthralled by the possibility of seeing scenes already admired in romantic movies. Kreisel shows his naiveté and blindness by having his brother-in-law Reuben disclose the truth about them. Reuben explains that street singers and musicians abound in the city but they really do not play for pleasure. Some of them are not even real musicians, just poor people who are trying to make a few pennies. It is just another form of begging. They are really just a part of the disintegration of society that is taking place.

Later during his sojourn, Jacob again meets a

[9]Henry Kreisel, The Rich Man, 1948; rpt. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961), p. 10. Further references to this edition will be in the text, followed by the page number.

group of musicians with another brother-in-law, Albert, Shaendl's husband. This time he specifically requests that they play "The Blue Danube" for him.

> The musicians broke off the piece they had been playing and started the waltz. They were trying to make up the harmony as they went along, and the piccolo was always just a little ahead of the others.
>
> "Tam tarum tam tam, pom pom, pom pom," Jacob hummed.
>
> Albert stood there, feeling uncomfortable. He was sorry for the three men. They were not even pretending to play in harmony any more. Each man played the tune himself, as if he were playing a slow solo, but all three were obviously keeping Jacob's order in mind for they were trying to outdo each other in slowness.
>
> God, Albert thought, it sounds like a funeral march. What are they trying to do, bury the Danube?
>
> (142)

The lack of harmony, the fact that each man is playing for himself in an orchestra that must play in tune to be harmonious, ironically comments on Jacob's own lack of harmony with reality and with the people he relates to. His insistence on hearing the piece performed as it is in his fantasies leads to a discordant and fragmented result, just as his belief in illusions leads to his own isolation. Albert, who is a desperate but lucid character in the novel, foreshadows the events that will occur in his city and perhaps his own death, when he thinks the performance is like a funeral march. Jacob, however is oblivious to all this and can only remark that a waltz must be played not too slow and not too fast.

The white suit that Jacob wears for his trip symbolizes the appropriation of a false identity to impress his relatives. It serves at the same time as an ironic comment

on his innocence. Throughout the novel reference is made to Jacob's childishness and boyishness, indicative of the fact that he refuses to see reality. When he buys gifts for his relatives in order to sustain the illusion of richness he sees himself as a "merchant arriving after long travels in foreign lands, bearing great gifts." (24) He takes pleasure in this pose often, and unwillingly surrenders it only at the very end.

Jacob's encounter with Tassigny on his voyage out provides another ironic juxtaposition and insight into Jacob's illusions. Jacob deliberately cultivates the artist's acquaintance in order to seem important to the other passengers on the trip. He buys a painting by the artist not because he likes or understands it but to show that he can afford it. Jacob starts to appreciate the painting for it gives him a false sense of power and wealth.[10] ". . . he fancied that with the purchase of the painting he had become not only Tassigny's equal but even his superior. He felt his ego grow and become inflated like a balloon. For was he not now a patron of the arts?" (40) Ironically Jacob acquires a portrait that is an unflattering reflection of himself.

The painting is entitled 'L'Entrepreneur' and according to the artist depicts a man "who has something to show off and he shouts and screams so people will hear and come and pay to see. . . . And what do they see, Monsieur?

[10]Robert Lecker, "States of Mind," p. 87.

. . . They see nothing. A few cheap eghzibisions." (36) Jacob is indeed an exhibitionist and a poseur. Throughout the novel he is very much aware of the impression that he is creating and he is careful to do his best in order to sustain the illusion. Upon arriving at his mother's home, "He paid the driver, slowly and with deliberate, almost studied poise, conscious of the silent eyes that were on him, conscious of the great sensation he was causing. He liked it. He liked it very much." (51) Later, when he announces that he has gifts for everyone, he once again acts with deliberate slowness in order to underline his power. His small nephews, Herman and Bernhardt, see him as a magician. He is indeed someone who creates and believes illusions. Like the 'Entrepreneur' Jacob only proclaims and never delivers. 'L'Entrepreneur' is a symbol of Jacob's emptiness.

The ironic connection between Jacob and the painting is amplified later in the novel when he shows the painting to his relatives and tries to reveal its merits. As a self-appointed critic of modern art he is less than successful but he does succeed in unwittingly describing himself. "Men like him have no heads. And why? Because everything is only hullabaloo that's the reason why. From this type of man only empty words come out. Only hocus pocus. He shouts so loud, you think it is the truth and you believe him." (78) Jacob has just described himself. Like the painting, Jacob has no real face. Extolling the virtues of an expensive painting that was acquired for the frivolous sake of showing

off and not for any true understanding of its meaning, becomes doubly ironic when it is done in an environment where money is scarce and one must struggle to have the bare necessities. Jacob's association with Tassigny points to two contrasting attitudes to life. Through his art, Tassigny explores reality and helps to reveal what is hidden. Jacob, on the other hand, masks what is real and hides behind illusions.

Other juxtapositions in the novel serve to illustrate the dichotomy of reality and dream world. Jacob's pretence is diametrically opposed to his family's genuine struggle to survive. Jacob believes that his sister Shaendl is unhappy because her husband Albert is not successful. Albert owns a small bookstore and sells mostly used books to poor students. Because Jacob has accepted the view that success must be measured in materialistic terms he cannot understand Albert's life. Albert, however, demonstrates a deep understanding of the conditions of the real world. He is much more in tune with what is happening than Jacob, who sits in the bookshop and does not understand a word of the conversation taking place between Albert and his friend Koch, a journalist who is wanted by the police. Albert and Koch are discussing the situation that exists in their country.

> . . . Albert continued. "I see man involved in a moral crisis which goes to the deepest roots of his being. Hitler is only the worst symptom of a disease which is a decay of human and spiritual values, of all the things that have made Western civilization great, and the tragic

thing is that few people really care." (132)

Albert's statement refers to Jacob's own lack of spiritual values and interest in the world he lives in. Jacob doesn't hold him in very high esteem and yet Albert's involvement is much more meaningful than Jacob's empty posing.

Albert's involvement with society goes beyond philosophical analysis. He hides his friend Koch in the back room of his bookstore when the latter must flee from the police. Jacob can only think of the danger involved in such an enterprise, whereas Albert responds with commitment to his friend's need. "A man's life was in danger. The life of a friend, after he had fought a good fight and lost. I didn't think about the police when I saw him sitting there, not knowing what to do next." (135) Albert acts by responding to his friend's dilemma. Jacob thinks only of himself and is incapable of action.

Jacob is also juxtaposed to Koch in the novel. In order to earn a living Koch must now work as a clown in an amusement park. Koch's disguise is the result of his real concern for people and his commitment to society. He must hide because he is very much involved with actual events. Jacob hides to escape from the real world.

Koch provides an ironic and biting commentary on Jacob's attitudes when he describes the potential tourist or foreigner who visits the city. It is the best way to visit the city for one need only follow a guide book.

Never look to the right or the left, always straight ahead. This enables you to see the palaces, but spares you the sight of the hovels." (130) Jacob makes an ideal tourist for he certainly lacks peripheral vision. Koch resumes his portrait of the tourist and indicates that to be successful the tourist must on no account involve himself with the people he meets. ". . . to enjoy himself thoroughly, a man should come alone and have a great deal of money. What goes on in the world must not concern him. He must be selfish--definitely not his brother's keeper." (131) The image of the tourist who superficially surveys the city he visits and then leaves without any real understanding of the society he finds is a fitting one for Jacob's attitude to life. However, the forcefulness of reality will succeed in shattering Jacob's illusions and finally make him a citizen of the world imperfect though it may be.

Reality slowly intrudes upon Jacob's consciousness until the final explosive effect of Albert's death towards the end of the novel causes him to awaken. On the train trip to Vienna Jacob's compartment is searched by storm guards whose uniforms bear the insignia of the two crossed bones and death's head. The image has a chilling effect on Jacob. At his mother's apartment, when the discussion about politics at the dinner table gets too heated, Reuben gets up to close the window fearing that someone might hear what they say. Again, Jacob feels a shiver running down his back.

Jacob experiences yet another startling brush with reality when he visits his nephews' secret cave. The cave is an image of entrapment and "represents his own need to hide from the outside world at will, simultaneously substituting for exterior reality an artificial milieu."[11] It is also indicative of the stifling consequences of this sort of viewpoint. The refuge turns into a prison when both Jacob and the children are baited by some young thugs. "All the air seemed to have been cut off. It was almost like being in a small windowless room, pressed against a narrow corner." (118) Jacob begins to realize that Vienna is not the romantic city that he imagined it to be, the city that he insists on seeing even though evidence points elsewhere.

Albert's death at the end of the novel precipitates a confrontation with himself. In keeping with his protective stance, he first reacts to the news selfishly and irresponsibly. He wonders why this had to happen on his visit back home. Furthermore, once Reuben asks him to help Shaendl out by paying her debts he waits as long as possible before revealing his true situation. However he finally realizes that he can no longer avoid the tragic events that are occuring.

> The illusion, the wonderful illusion of the past four weeks had suddenly come to a shattering, painful ugly end. He was an insignificant poor presser again . . . and all the grandiloquence, all the splendour, and all the luxurious pretensions had now quite fallen away,

[11] Robert Lecker, "States of Mind," p. 85.

> and from the recesses of the past mocked at his pitiable nakedness.
>
> (177)

This humbling experience brings back the focus to where it should have been at the very beginning-back to family, back to people. He thinks of Shaendl, who has forgiven him and who has gained a new strength because she knows that she must fight for her family. His last thoughts are not about himself. They are of her, of Albert and Koch, a group of people who have lived their lives in a way that was diametrically opposed to his own. Jacob finally recognizes himself in the portrait of the 'Entrepreneur'. In destroying and flinging away the picture he destroys the lie that he has been living. Through this act, he returns to the real world. "This time he is leaving forever not his family but his childhood. He finally comes of age as an old man in an Old World."[12]

Through the use of irony in The Rich Man Henry Kreisel illustrates the need for man, whether immigrant or native, to actively involve himself in life. He himself also feels this commitment and has demonstrated it in his own life. His experience as an immigrant, writer and administrator has permitted him to contribute to the country in which he settled.

[12] Janet Bitton, "The Canadian 'Ethnic' Novel: The Protagonists' Search for Self-Definition" (M.A. Thesis, University of Montreal, 1971), p. 75.

> I would say also that my involvement in university affairs is, in a way, a personal response to my early feelings of alienation and exile. In a sense, I always felt the need somehow to make a contribution to the wider society. I wasn't content simply to be a teacher or an isolated writer. I felt the need also to involve myself in the affairs of the country which had received me and to which I'm grateful.[13]

This viewpoint is illustrated in The Rich Man where the need to involve oneself in life is also felt through the commentary that is made on Jacob Grossman's illusions and their isolating consequences.

[13]Henry Kreisel, "Certain Wordly Experiences," p. 17-18.

In The Luck of Ginger Coffey the protagonist sets out on a search for fame and fortune in the New World. In the process he discovers himself. Ginger Coffey sheds his self-delusions and comes face to face with the sad impostor that greets him every time he looks in the mirror and is the image of his true self. His inflated hopes fade away at the end of the novel and are replaced by the realization of his limitations. As in The Rich Man, the protagonist finally assumes the responsibility that is needed to grow out of the innocence and boyishness that have prevented him from dealing with reality. In replacing the materialistic values that he thought were the key to success in the New World by the philosophy of love, he breaks his isolation and enters the real world. In the novel Brian Moore depicts "the struggle of the individual to commit himself to life, to abandon protective disguises or self-deceptions, and like 'a drop of water joining an ocean' embrace his humanity."[14] Ginger learns that in order to be part of life he must start thinking of others and stop attributing value to unrealistic dreams that will only isolate him from the people around him.

Tired of an unfulfilled existence in Ireland and of the confining effect of the importance of religion in his home town, Ginger emigrates to Canada hoping that his days

[14]Hugo McPherson, "Fiction: 1940-1960," p. 230.

of being a glorified secretary are over. He is full of optimism that he will succeed in this new land. Moore comments on this attitude in an interview conducted by Robert Fulford.

> And I think a great many people came to Canada buoyed up with sort of ridiculous hopes about the future . . . In the immediate post-war period Canada was painted as a land of promise and plenty and people who weren't doing very well at home came out here, and got a terrible shock because they met a society that really wanted--you know--work for money. And you had to know how to do something.[15]

Ginger does not know how to do something. In coming to Canada he hopes to achieve fame and fortune but he does not realize that his inadequacies will not suddenly disappear. In order to find a place in the new society he must do away with the unrealistic image he has of himself and which is preventing any real contact with people.

In the novel Moore ironically juxtaposes Ginger's inflated hopes and his view of himself with the actual image he projects to others. At the beginning of the novel Ginger attributes to himself the romantic role of the adventurer who has come to conquer new lands. "Wasn't he at long last an adventurer, a man who gambled all on one horse, a horse colored Canada, which now by hook and crook, would carry him to fame and fortune?"[16] For Ginger, coming to Canada is

[15] Brian Moore, "Robert Fulford Interviews Brian Moore," Tamarack Review 23: 16-17.

[16] Brian Moore, The Luck of Ginger Coffey 1960; rpt. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), p. 11. Further references to this edition will be in the text.

connected with his boyish dreams of success and adventure--paddling down the Amazon or climbing a peak in Tibet, sailing from Galway to the West Indies. Ginger is trying to escape from himself but it is precisely in the new world that he will find himself. There will be no romantic adventures for him here, only a reality that will ultimately force him to acknowledge his true self.

Ginger considers himself a handsome fellow, well dressed and self-assured. He carefully nurtures his image but ironically he projects one that is not very flattering. The farcical elements of his appearance and actions serve to highlight his delusions.

> Now in his prime, he considered himself a fine big fellow with a soldierly straightness to him, his red hair thick as ever and a fine mustache to boot. And another thing. He believed that clothes made the man and the man he had made of himself was a Dublin squire. Sports clothes took years off him, he thought, and he always bought the very best of stuff.
>
> (6)

The squire image is out of place in the society he now lives in. It is also highly ironic that he should choose to present himself in this way since he was never a squire in his native land. The image has nothing to do with the real Ginger. Furthermore his contention that "clothes made the man" reveals a highly superficial view of life that keeps Ginger from acknowledging the truth about himself. When Ginger is interviewed by a prospective employer, the latter thinks that Ginger should know better than to dress like a college boy and he concludes from his appearance that he is

a nobody, the very opposite effect that Ginger wants to achieve. Brott, the employer that finally is willing to give Ginger a chance in the diaper service company, sees him as a "burleycue" comedian and wonders whether he is a "rummy." Ginger does not realize that the image he projects is diametrically opposed to his intentions and reflects his shortcomings.

Brian Moore ironically substitutes another uniform that is more suited to Ginger than the squire suit he thinks identifies him. When Ginger takes on a second job at the Tiny Ones diaper service his alleged identity as a squire is shed and he assumes the identity of a servile and anonymous errand boy, the very type he wanted to leave behind him forever. "Off went his Tyrolean hat, his hacking jacket, his grey tweed trousers and suede boots. On the bench they lay, the last remains of Ginger Coffey. On went the uniform, anonymous and humiliating . . . The uniform fitted perfectly." (115) Ginger is later humiliated by this uniform when in the course of his rounds he encounters a woman that he knew in Ireland. The uniform fits perfectly because it better adheres to Ginger's limitations and shortcomings than, for example, the coveted role of journalist which represents his self-delusions. In the context of the novel, and in Moore's view, association with the diaper service is not humiliating or negative for it is there that Ginger will finally be offered a chance to contribute to his new society. He refuses a promotion at Tiny Ones and blindly

puts his faith in the newspaper editor MacGregor, who has no intention of making him a journalist. He is only interested in exploiting him as cheap labor.

Ginger sees himself as strong and soldierly but the people around him detect his vulnerability and boyishness. His longing shows clearly on his face no matter how business-like he would like to appear. This is evident in his dealings with MacGregor at the newspaper. In fact it is because of Ginger's vulnerability that the editor is able to exploit him. "He turned towards MacGregor, his face a child's in its longing." (191) Ginger expects a promotion that will never come. The waitress at the restaurant where Ginger gets drunk at the end of the novel also glimpses what is behind the facade. "Behind that large trembly dignity, behind that military facade of mustache and middle age, Rose Alma saw his true face. Like a boy, she thought. Lost." (217) Ginger's immature outlook prevents him from assuming personal and family responsibilities.

Like a child, Ginger blames someone else for his problems and is unable to face up to the consequences of his actions. He alienates his family not because he seems unable to make a living but because he is not honest with them and with himself. Vera, his wife, reproaches him for his selfish attitude. Ginger continually comes up with excuses to mitigate his errors. His search for a mythical job that will fit his erroneous self image pulls him away from his wife and child.

> Isn't the job you're in always a burden to you, isn't it always no good according to you? And isn't there always a crock of gold waiting for you in the next job you're going to get? Ginger, will you never learn anything? Will you never face the facts?
> (58)

Vera realizes that Ginger continually deceives himself about his prospects, his identity, and about the values that he needs to succeed in the new world. Ginger believes that his wife has left him because he doesn't have enough money. This is another way of avoiding responsibility, another way to avoid questioning himself.

Ironically Ginger's boyish optimism blinds him to his true situation. Throughout the novel he continually coaxes himself on and he is forever giving himself pep talks. Expressions such as, "chin up," "maybe today his ship would come in," "he still had hopes" reveal Ginger's outlook and his inability to look squarely upon what is happening. He projects his hopes into the future in the hope that they will somehow be realized. When his friend Grosvenor sets up an interview for him at the newspaper and he ends up with the job of proofreader rather than editor (a job he is obviously unqualified for) he thinks, "Maybe MacGregor would promote him in a week or so? Probably would." (63) He tries to convince himself that this will indeed happen for he is unable to cope with a possible deception. At the end of his first night's work he had, "by his habitual process of ratiocination convinced himself that the day was not a defeat but a victory. A

little victory." (78) This puts off any possibility of analysis or doubt.

Ginger's potential disintegration is reflected in Moore's ironic portrayal of the minor character Warren K. Wilson. Ginger meets him at the Y.M.C.A. after his wife and daughter have left him and he has had to give up the apartment. Wilson is the one that tells Ginger of the diaper service job. Wilson has given it up for he is on his way up. He is a specialist in correspondence courses and has taken everything from private detective to TV repair but he has never exercised a profession. He is forever wanting to become something but never achieves it for his energies are dissipated in too many different directions that do not really lead anywhere. Warren believes that ". . . you got to keep moving, do whatever comes along." (111) However he himself is really headed nowhere for he is on his way to a job North at Blind River. Ginger considers this man a romantic figure but he is blinded to the pathetic lack of focus that can be his own if he does not straighten his priorities.

As a proofreader at the newspaper, Ginger meets a group of men that have sacrificed themselves for money and who drown their inadequacies in drink. Their cynical and destructive attitude is the result of their worship of the almighty dollar. If Ginger stays at the newspaper he may very well end up in the same hell. The proofreaders are cut off from the mainstream of the newspaper workers just

as Ginger is cut off from the mainstream of life through his blindness and self-delusion.

In the novel the progression towards self-awareness is achieved through the use of the mirror who is a teller of truths.[17] To Ginger, it presents his true face and not the one that he thinks he projects to the rest of the world. The mirror is usually introduced after a moment of crisis and shows the ironic reversal of Ginger's mask. It is presented for the first time when Grosvenor admits his love for Vera and Ginger punches him.

> He sat down on the bed, in large trembling dignity. His image in the dresser mirror looked at him: large, trembling. Look at him, would you, sitting there with his great big ginger mustache, in the hacking jacket he spent hours picking out in Grafton Street, with the tie to match. . . .
>
> He looked at him. A stupid man, dressed up like a Dublin squire. Looked at the frightened, childish face frozen now in a military man's disguise. He hated that man in the mirror, hated him. Oh, God, there was a useless bloody man, coming up to forty and still full of a boy's dreams of ships coming in; of adventures and escapes and glories still to be.
>
> (93)

Ginger is a "sad impostor" who continually shies away from the mirror's truth, until the final realization of its veracity. The mirror image punctuates his actions and brings out the less flattering aspects of his self. "He saw his face in the window pane. The sad impostor considered him: he considered the lack of dignity in the actions of that graceless fool." (160) The mirror juxtaposes reality

[17] Jack Ludwig, "A Mirror of Moore," Canadian Literature 7: 20.

and fabrication. In order to mature Ginger must realize the truth that the mirror brings. He is only able to do this at the very end of the novel when reality precipitates a crisis and Ginger must finally see himself the way he really is.

Moore comments on the confrontation with the self in his novels.

> When I wrote most of my novels I was interested . . . in presenting the moment in a person's life, the crucial few weeks or months when one suddenly confronts the reality or unreality of one's illusions because that to me is what the drama of the novel is.[18]

In The Luck of Ginger Coffey the protagonist finally faces his illusions after he has been put in jail for indecent exposure. Ginger's refusal of Brott's genuine offer and his attempts to cling to the false promises of MacGregor provoke the final crisis of the novel when the editor finally admits that he is not promoting Ginger. Finally stripped of all his illusions Ginger realizes that he has been deceiving himself. Once again the mirror serves as a device to reveal the truth. In the jail cell ". . . he saw his own face angled in the reflection from the glass pane. He stared at that hateful stupid man . . . He knew something now, something he had not known before. A man's life was nobody's fault but his own. Not God's, not Vera's, not even Canada's. His own fault. Mea culpa." (223) Once he can

[18] Quoted in David Staines, "Observance Without Belief," Canadian Literature 73: 21.

admit this, Ginger is finally reunited with his family and reconciled with life. At the end of the novel he realizes the importance of love and human relationships[19]. And although he has not succeeded in any material sense he has discovered the values that are important for participation in society even though he must remain in "humble circs."

[19] David Staines, "Observance Without Belief," 15.

Chapter II

The Urban Jungle: The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and Under the Ribs of Death

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and Under the Ribs of Death denounce the dehumanizing influence of the protagonists' pursuit of identity through material wealth. Both Duddy and Sandor struggle to belong to society but they "have grown up believing that somehow a large bank balance is what they chiefly need to enable them to hold their own and to solve their identity crisis and this is what they attempt to acquire."[20] These characters' unchallenged acceptance of the validity of such a vision blinds them to the inherently alienating consequences of their pursuit. Sandor fails both economically and spiritually. At the end of the novel, he is alone, reduced to immobility in a rat-infested basement. Duddy, though he gains his land, loses himself, and is estranged from the only people that really cared for him. In these two novels the reader witnesses "the tragic irony of a vision that was intended to redeem but conquered instead."[21] Too great a faith in a view that

[20] Allison Mitcham, "The Isolation of Protesting Individuals Who Belong to Minority Groups," Wascana Review 7: 48.

[21] Janet Bitton, "The Canadian 'Ethnic' novel," p. 132.

places materialism over personal and communal awareness leads to isolation and defeat.

Both The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and Under the Ribs of Death are referred to by T. D. Macluclich as examples of the urban novel. "The Urban examines life in large metropolitan centres, and often presents the consequences of pursuing the American dream of material success. . . . The Urban studies the consequences of accepting the public philosophy of success which pervades the North American popular ideology."[22] Marlyn and Richler present "material success as a threat to moral values."[23] The exploration of their protagonists' experience and perception is based on this opposition. It is the basis for the structural ironies of Marlyn's plot in Under the Ribs of Death and for Duddy's ironic progression in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz.

[22] T. D. Macluclich, "Our Place on the Map: The Canadian Tradition in Fiction," University of Toronto Quarterly 52 (Winter 1982-83): 203.

[23] Ibid., p. 204.

In The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz Duddy's progress is observed with an ironic eye. Duddy's dream and drive towards success are ultimately tested against his commitment to others. His single-minded mission to find and possess land is an attempt to belong to society but it is also a distortion of his grandfather's spiritual and mythic ideal. Duddy's victory at the end of the novel underlines the perversion of his search. Throughout he has been interested in the economic dimension of his struggle only. He has been unable to transcend this dimension to gain a greater understanding of himself or his relationship to others. His last words in the novel: "You see," ironically speak for his blindness. He does not see that his actions have made him into a replica of the Boy Wonder. The portrayal of Duddy, however, is not totally negative. As in Son of a Smaller Hero, Richler's sense of the ambiguities present in both the ghetto and in life informs the portrayal. Duddy, as is revealed in his uncle Benjy's letter is two people: "a scheming little bastard" and "a fine, intelligent boy." His apprenticeship will be complete when he has chosen which of the two he wants to be.

In his portrayal of Duddy as a boy in Part One of the novel, Richler establishes the two poles of Duddy's character. Duddy is harsh, crude and a troublemaker. He often leads his friends in attacks on teachers or other boys. His insensitive attitude towards Macpherson, a teacher at Fletcher's Field High School, foreshadows his

shabby treatment of Virgil at the end of the novel. Duddy's anonymous call to Macpherson leads to his invalid wife's death. Macpherson's ironic "You'll go far Kravitz" also points to the negative direction of Duddy's quest. At the same time, however, we discover that Duddy does not have a mother and that he often thinks of her and wonders whether she loved him. Duddy's father Max, is a pimp and he seems to care more for his son Lennie, the medical student, than for Duddy. To compensate for this lack of affection, Duddy invents an imaginary brother named Bradley.

> He had run away to the States at fifteen, lied about his age, joined the air force and sunk three Jap battleships in the Pacific. They were going to make a movie about his life, maybe. After the war Bradley had rescued an Arizona millionaire's beautiful daughter from drowning, married her, and bought a ranch.[24]

This romantic portrayal, reveals Duddy's need for attention as well as his need to identify himself with a successful figure. As his uncle Benjy realizes much later, Duddy is two people: one is a ruthless and conniving pusher and the other a sensitive boy who loves his family and deeply misses their respect and love.

Duddy's business sense is foreshadowed through his many ventures: the stamp collecting business, dirty comic books, stealing hockey sticks during a team's practice sessions. Success is important for him at any cost. Duddy

[24] Mordecai Richler, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz 1958; rpt. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p. 16. Further references to this edition will be in the text.

is preparing to realize his dream. This dream is the driving force behind all his feverish actions. When a very young boy, Duddy's grandfather, Simcha Kravitz, tells him: "A man without land is nobody. Remember that, Duddel." (49) For the grandfather, this is a quasi-mythical dream of peace in the promised land, the dream of the immigrant who wants a place where he will belong. Duddy, on the other hand, translates this dream into a very practical and down to earth scheme--he must own a piece of land and turn it into some sort of fashionable resort.

> Money is the most important thing in Duddy's world and it is easy for him to misunderstand his grandfather's saying that a man without land is a nobody. The old man of two ghettos, one in the old and one in the new world, dreams ineffectually of a pastoral world, perhaps (as in Klein's Zionist poems) of Israel. Duddy dreams instead of development and exploitation and a vulgar but lucrative resort.[25]

Every time he thinks of his land he thinks of the profit it will bring him. The grandfather's view and Duddy's view are continually juxtaposed throughout the novel. "He could watch the lake over his shoulder and in his mind's eye it was not already his but the children's camp and the hotel were already coming up." (99) Viewing his land in the winter he observes, "It's lovely, he thought, and lots of those pine trees I can peddle at Christmas time." (212) Duddy is unable to transcend the purely economic aspect of

[25] Tom Marshall, "Third Solitude: Canadian as Jew," The Canadian Novel Here and Now," ed. John Moss (Toronto: NcPress, 1978), p. 149

his quest. The land is not a means to an end. It is just an end. "He has devoted his energy to acquiring property; he has done nothing to develop himself."[26] Duddy translates the wish to be a somebody in purely material terms. He does not see that it also involves a positive response in his relationship to others.

Duddy's dream is from the very beginning associated with the Boy Wonder, Jerry Dingleman, for it is through its realization that he wishes to emulate his idol. Duddy will acquire the land and be a somebody, another Boy Wonder, perhaps. Duddy's childhood has been nurtured with the legend of the Boy Wonder, a legend that is kept alive by Duddy's father, Max Kravitz. Max has transformed Dingleman's life into a mythical and romantic story. In this distorted system of values the reprehensible becomes admirable. The Boy Wonder's devious methods are praised and reflect Duddy's.

Richler demonstrates the hollowness of the myth of the Boy Wonder, and hence the hollowness of the myth of material success, by his comic and grotesque description of the character. The outer distortions reflect the inner ones.

> His shoulders and chest developed enormously and his legs dwindled to thin body sticks. He put on lots of weight. Everywhere he went the Boy Wonder huffed and puffed and had to wipe the sweat from the back of his rolled hairy neck with a handkerchief. The bony head seemed massive . . . His curly black hair had dried.

[26] A. R. Bevan, "Introduction," The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, p. 5.

The mouth began to turn down sharply at the corners. (133)

This grotesque figure also symbolizes the inverted values that Duddy has adopted. The Boy Wonder remains his idol for a long time. Duddy makes his acquaintance and though at first rebuffed, he is later used by the Boy Wonder to carry drugs. Dingleman sees that there is a lot of naiveté in Duddy. " 'Don't worry,' Dingleman said. 'The boy is innocent. He's perfect.' " (138) It is only much later that Duddy realizes that the white powder in the coffee tins was drugs. Duddy tries to use this information later in order to enlist his help but the Boy Wonder is interested in Duddy's land himself. Duddy's victory over the Boy Wonder at the end of the novel is set in a highly ironic context. Duddy unmasks the Boy Wonder and reveals what he really is. "You two-bit, dope-smuggling cripple!" (314) By chasing him off his land, Duddy has in fact taken his place, for he has used methods much like Dingleman's to acquire his land.

Another one of Duddy's victories is also set in an ironic context. While working at the Rubin resort as a waiter one summer, Duddy is involved with a group of college boys. These boys do not share his background. They are all from more prosperous families. They reject Duddy from the very beginning and play all sorts of tricks on him. This leads to a climactic scene where Duddy acts as a banker for a roulette game in which most of the business men of the resort participate. Duddy's fellow waiters have rigged

the game and Duddy loses all his money. However he gets back almost twice the amount for the waiters give him back the money.

Through this episode Duddy criticizes and exposes his co-workers and calls them thieves for all their college education. Furthermore, he also reveals the hypocrisy that characterizes their lives.

> 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 guys' 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 and who pays for those drinks in the afternoon?
>
> (94)

Duddy with all his pushing and scheming, seems here less hypocritical than this group. He does not care for appearances in a world where everyone is hiding behind superficial rules.[27] However, Richler undercuts this by having Duddy say, "Cheaters never prosper . . . I hope this'll be a good lesson for you. I hope you'll profit from it in the future." (93) Coming from him, this is a highly ironic remark and reveals his blindness and lack of self-analysis.

[27]This view is presented in Warren Tallman's interpretation of Duddy in his essay Wolf in the Snow (Canadian Literature 7: 41-48.)"Duddy has ceased to care for appearances and this insouciance releases him from the nightmare. All of the other people in the novel cannot possess themselves because their vital energies are devoted full-time to maintaining the false appearances in terms of which they identify themselves." This interpretation of Duddy as a crusader, and a character affirming life, shows only one aspect of his portrayal. It fails to account for the ironic conclusion of the novel.

Duddy will cheat his friend Virgil, and he will think that he has prospered.

Friendship is measured in materialistic terms. Duddy exploits his friendship with Virgil to get his land. Duddy also shows no qualms about selling the contents of the house Uncle Benjy left him. "My uncle's dead, I've got to go on living. When I've got the money we'll furnish the home according to our tastes." (300) Uncle Benjy had left him the house as a trust, Duddy's desperate need for money must come before any consideration for others. Duddy does not understand the meaning of trust. He is forever wary of everyone around him, including Yvette. "Duddy must both extend trust and be extended trust before he can achieve recognizable adult status."[28] Duddy, therefore, does not complete this aspect of his apprenticeship, for he betrays almost everyone who has genuinely cared for him.

Duddy does however show that he is capable of loyalty and love. These sentiments are reserved for his family. Throughout the novel, even at the height of his planning, Duddy always thinks of his grandfather for whom he has a genuine love. When his brother, Lennie, gets in trouble because of his attempt to perform an abortion on Mr. Calder's daughter, Duddy does not hesitate to track down his brother in Toronto and bring him back. Ironically, he is much more efficient than his brother Lennie with all his

[28] William H. New, "The Apprenticeship of Discovery," Canadian Literature 29 (Summer 1966): 21.

medical scholarships and knowledge, and arranges things so that he can return to school.

Duddy demonstrates the same concern when his uncle Benjy is dying of cancer. He goes to the States to bring back Benjy's estranged wife, Ida. Although he himself had not gotten along with his uncle, Duddy shows compassion. When his aunt insists on explaining everything that has gone wrong with their marriage, he says, "He's your husband and he's dying. So?" (238); and later, "Listen, he's got cancer. I don't know what complications there are, but--Please lets go. Aunti Ida?" (239) He understands that his uncle needs them all at this time and he is willing to put aside differences to offer comfort. Duddy is potentially capable of giving his apprenticeship a more spiritual dimension, but he must acknowledge this aspect in his life.

His uncle Benjy is aware of this and his letter to Duddy offers an interpretation of the portrayal of Duddy and the novel's ending. Acknowledging his mistake in initially having misjudged Duddy, Benjy writes,

> There's more to you than mere money-lust, Duddy, but I'm afraid for you. You're two people, that's why. The scheming little bastard I saw so easily and the fine, intelligent boy underneath that your grandfather, bless him saw. But you're coming of age soon and you'll have to choose. A boy can be two, three, four potential people, but a man is only one. He murders the others.
> There's a brute inside you, Duddel--a regular behemoth--and this being such a hard world it would be the easiest thing for you to let it overpower you. Don't, Duddel. Be a gentleman. A <u>mensh</u>.
> (280)

Duddy's response to the letter will be seen in examining

his relationship to Yvette and Virgil and the ending of the novel.

When Duddy first meets Yvette at Rubin's resort where she is working as a chambermaid, he says to a fellow waiter, "Aw, Yvette. Those are a dime a dozen." (80) He is more interested in Linda Rubin who ends up swindling him by joining the group of waiters that make Duddy lose his money. Duddy's relationship to Yvette is from the beginning based on his selfish needs. On an outing with Yvette, Duddy first discovers the land that he will later make his own. In an exchange between Yvette and him, Richler ironically juxtaposes Duddy's materialistic intentions and Yvette's romantic ones.

> "Have you ever brought anyone else here before?"
> His expression alarmed her.
> "Answer me!"
> "You're jealous," she said.
> He stiffened against her embrace.
> "That's nice," she said softly. "I'm glad."
> Duddy realized that they were both nude and for the first time he was embarassed.
> "You fool," he shouted. "You little fool. I'm not jealous. But you've got to tell me. I want the truth. Have you ever been here with anyone from the hotel?" (98)

Duddy is trying to find out if anyone else knows about the land for he wants to protect his investment. In calling Yvette a little fool he demonstrates his dismissal of her feelings in favour of what will become his obsession. His crude gesture in his later offering her fifty dollars to tell no one about the place betrays his values. He thinks that loyalty can be bought. He does not know that it must

be earned.

Throughout the novel, Yvette is the recipient of Duddy's insensitivity. However, perhaps because she senses that behind his brash and harsh exterior lies another dimension to Duddy, she decides to stay with him and help him in his venture. She even comes up with some money that is needed to pay for the land, and intervenes when some of the owners do not want to sell to Jews. The papers are in her name for Duddy is not yet eighteen. Yvette supports Duddy without asking for anything in return. Her gradual loss of faith in him becomes the reader's own. Like Yvette, we are witnesses to Duddy's wheeling and dealing, to his relentless drive towards his goal. The final breach comes when Duddy mistreats Virgil, the epileptic he had met in the States and who had made the journey to bring the pinball machines Duddy has bought there.

Duddy is Virgil's idol. He admires him immensely and when Duddy gives him a job delivering movies for his company, Virgil is even more appreciative. For Duddy, however, Virgil is a person he knows can be trusted and one he doesn't have to pay very much. He is an errand boy who will never cheat him. Because of this job, Virgil has an accident and is confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Uncle Benjy's letter comes after Virgil's accident, Duddy has already begun to let the brute overpower him. The process is completed when Duddy forges Virgil's signature to get the remaining two thousand dollars he needs to finally

own the land. Duddy has made his final choice. He has chosen materialistic values, not loyalty to human relationships. He is now abandondoned by those who cared for him most.

The ironic conclusion of the novel is a forceful commentary on Duddy and those who, like him, use the people around them for personal gain. Duddy thinks, "The land is yours . . . and nothing they do or feel can take it away from you. You pay a price." (316). The price that Duddy pays is indeed enormous. Through his false victory he has alienated not only Virgil and Yvette, but also his grandfather, who knows what Duddy has done to get the land. He sees that Duddy intends to use him also to ease his conscience. "I can see what you have planned for me, Duddel. You'll be good to me. You'd give me everything I wanted. And that would settle your conscience when you went out to swindle others." (315) The person that Duddy wanted most to impress has seen through his deceit. Duddy remains alone at the end of the novel.

> Duddy is alone--he leads, hurts and confounds those close to him but he is not one of them . . . He works so obsessively to belong, to be accepted, that he is excluded from either world and he has not the capacity to realize it to understand that in gaining his coveted land he himself is lost.[29]

He has chased the Boy Wonder from his land only to take his place. Max had already begun to mythologize his

[29] John Moss, Patterns of Isolation, p. 196.

son's life as he had done for the Boy Wonder.

> "He was born on the wrong side of the tracks with a rusty spoon in his mouth, so to speak, and the spark of rebellion in him. A motherless boy," he said, pounding the table, "but one who thrived on adversity . . . You could see he was slated for fame and fortune." (318)

Duddy has become a legendary figure and the final consecration is the waiter's offer to mark his tab. The "you see" that ends the novel, rings out as a condemnation, for Duddy does not see what he has done. He has been unable to transcend the physical and material dimension of his dream. He remains a prisoner of its stifling influence, alone, without the comfort of true human relationships.

In Under the Ribs of Death Sandor's acceptance of the dream of material success and its isolating consequences is contrasted to his father's humanistic philosophy with its emphasis on tolerance and acceptance. The dichotomy between the son's view and the father's is the source for Marlyn's ironic treatment of Sandor and the ironic reversals in the novel. The father is more aware of the pluralistic nature of Canadian society than his son, who equates being Canadian with being English, rich and successful. Sandor's first-hand encounter with the prejudice of the English does not result in a desire to affirm himself. It rather makes him more determined to copy their lifestyle.

Throughout the novel Marlyn reveals what lies behind the appearance that Sandor accepts as fact and reality. With the Depression and the economic crash, the irony of fate brings all Sandor's strivings to naught--the values that he had so ferociously clung to in order to succeed cause his downfall. Although Sandor does acquire a measure of understanding in being emotionally reconciled with his father, he remains trapped in his acceptance of the philosophy of material success. It is rather characters like Sandor's father, and Sandor's uncle Janos, that demonstrate the importance of the communal values necessary for survival in the Canadian society.

In an interview accorded to Beverly Raspotich Marlyn

says the following about his book. "The basic conflict is the philosophical dichotomy between the father and the son, Sandor, between humanism and blatant, rampant commercialism."[30] They are two attitudes, two ways of looking at reality and Canadian society. The father's humanistic view is based on the brotherhood of man, tolerance, and the need for spiritual values. He feels that "not survival of the fittest but mutual aid was the deciding factor."[31] Sandor's philosophy isolates people while the father's brings them together. When his son returns home after having fought with the English boys at school, Mr. Hunyadi explains that it is wrong to fight and that Sandor should have tried to reason with the boys. In his home he demonstrates his adherence to the concept of mutual aid by helping the boarders that are living under his roof. To Sandor's bitterness over their poverty and Hungarian origins he responds:

> "It is shameful to be a money-chaser, to be dishonest, and to remain ignorant when the opportunity for learning is so great here. But to be ashamed of your name because you are Hungarian and poor! When you grow up you will laugh to think that such things ever troubled you . . . Do you understand, Sandor?"
>
> (25)

The tragic irony of Sandor's existence lies in the fact that he cannot understand this. He cannot accept the only

[30] John Marlyn, "An Interview with John Marlyn," by Beverly Rasporich in Canadian Ethnic Studies 14 (1982): 37.

[31] John Marlyn, Under the Ribs of Death 1957; rpt. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), p. 26. Further references to this edition will be in the text.

redeeming vision that would ensure his salvation. For Marlyn, as for the authors of the other works analysed in this thesis, denial of one's true self, inhibits participation in society. For the father, the pursuit of knowledge and spiritual values would lead to a greater awareness of oneself and of one's relation to the world, whereas a preoccupation with money and material success leads to a diminished concept of self.

The father's view is also based on an acceptance of the relative and tentative nature of the apprehension of reality. Through his reading and interest in philosophical questions Mr. Hunyadi believes that there are no absolutes, just differing interpretations of reality. Things embody more than just their apparent characteristics. One must go beyond appearances to acquire understanding. In a discussion about the nature of reality he says, ". . . the table is not what it appears to be from a commonsense viewpoint. For example, if a number of observers sit around and examine it, each one depending upon his position will see it differently. Each one sees a different table." (126) The novel presents this view, with its recognition of various viewpoints and its understanding of the pluralistic aspect of Canadian society as a contrast to Sandor's narrow and isolating conception of a society that only strives for material success and is based on the supremacy of one ethnic group. When asked by his father's friend to explain his beliefs, his concept of reality, Sandor answers, "I just believe in

things the way they are . . . the way things are is all right with me." (128) Sandor accepts things at face value and does not question appearances. He is unaware that things are not always what they seem. The dream of material success is accepted as his own and as the only way of succeeding and defining himself.

Sandor interprets reality in terms of the commercialism that he identifies with the English. As a boy, he enters their privileged realm by taking a summer job mowing and cleaning lawns. When Sandor enters Mrs. Creighton's home he is overwhelmed by its luxury, and thinks, "This is it . . . the real thing. Comfort, wealth and beauty." (68) The "real thing" for Sandor is money and wealth. He dreams of a future filled with things to possess.

Sandor's first contact with the English neighbourhood that he works in is full of enchantment. It is an idyllic view connected with childhood fantasy. It is a dream world that Sandor interprets as real.

> It was as though he had walked into a picture in one of his childhood books, past the printed margin to a land that lay smiling under a friendly spell, where the sun always shone, and the clean-washed tint of sky and child and garden would never fade; where one could walk, but on tip-toe, and look and look but never touch, and never speak to break the enchanted hush.
>
> (64)

In this world the ladies are splendid. There are toys on the lawns and the children are happy. Here Sandor meets Eric, a boy who has everything Sandor would like to have.

Marlyn reveals the illusive nature of this vision. Mrs. Creighton might seem a splendid lady, but she is not above getting down on her haunches and scrutinizing the lawn on all four corners to see if Sandor has done a good job. This is for the back lawn. On the front lawn she merely walks about to inspect it, thus maintaining decorum in front of the neighbours. Eric, the happy, rich boy, is far from content. He likes to fix things--bicycles and clocks--but this is frowned upon by his parents and friends for they feel it is not proper behaviour. Sandor cannot understand how he could possibly be unhappy living in a rich house with a maid and toys. He does not understand the illusive nature of the values that he has adopted and that social status does not necessarily give one a sense of purpose.

Sandor's encounter with the prejudice of some of the other members of the community ironically strengthens his resolve to imitate their ways. In an article entitled "Foreigner: The Immigrant Voice in The Sacrifice and Under the Ribs of Death," Robert Thacker examines the novel in terms of its reflection of contemporary social conditions in Winnipeg.[32] He reveals that one of the most pervasive attitudes towards immigrants at the time was the nativistic attitude--a sense of distrust toward the immigrant because he was "foreign" and a corresponding wish that he assimilate to the Anglo Saxon way of life. This view is found for

[32] Robert Thacker, "Foreigner: The Immigrant Voice in The Sacrifice and Under the Ribs of Death," Canadian Ethnic Studies Volume XIV, 1 (1982): 25-35.

example in Ralph Connor's novel The Foreigner and J. S. Woodsworth's study of the immigrant situation in Strangers Within Our Gates.

In the novel Sandor is faced with the prejudice that he finds at school and later on in the business world where it is typified by a prospective employer named Atkinson. At school Sandor is almost daily beseiged by a gang of English boys who bait and chase him. As a young man he seeks employment and is rebuffed by Mr. Atkinson. The latter seems more interested in Sandor's family and connections than his abilities. Sandor realizes that this is just a more refined version of the name calling that he had to endure from the English boys at school. Through these confrontations Sandor has internalized a negative view of himself.

Because he has accepted this view as truth he hesitates to identify himself when people ask his name. At school he is embarassed when he must repeat and spell his name for the school nurse or the librarian. When Mrs. Creighton asks him his name he changes it to Alex Humphrey because,

> . . . to tell her now was suddenly impossible. She would smile and there would begin again the familiar, terrible ritual of mouthing it, and there would come over him again the feeling that he was exposing something naked and ugly to the world's gaze.
>
> (65-66)

He gives his name as Alex Humphrey, a name he feels is more genteel and fits in better with his new surroundings. Sandor reinvents himself on false premises. In his desire to appear

less "foreign" he ironically assumes a name that is foreign to him. Furthermore Sandor seems to confuse Mrs. Creighton's possible unfamiliarity with Hungarian names with contempt. In this case here, the contempt is only in Sandor's head.

Although Sandor is incensed by Mr. Atkinson's attitude, he accepts it without question. Instead of questioning this viewpoint and seeing it as just one way of looking at reality as his father is able to do, he accepts it as truth and allows it to rule his life. Because he believes in things the way they are, "he does not challenge the order of things, he accepts it as natural then struggles to bend his life to fit into it."[33] In fact Sandor thinks it so natural that the English have a contemptuous attitude towards foreigners that he considers that there must be something wrong with Lawson, an English friend who treats him as an equal.

> And what was worse, since he had not found a vestige of prejudice against foreigners in this man, was that he had actually come to believe that Lawson was in some indefinable way inferior to those who harboured such feelings--as though the mere fact of Lawson's friendship with someone foreign-born was a flaw in his character, an indication of weakness.
>
> (175)

Sandor criticizes Lawson for exhibiting, like his father, a broader understanding of relationships and humanity.

Sandor's view of the English neighbourhood and the

[33] John Roberts, "Irony in an Immigrant Novel: John Marlyn's Under the Ribs of Death," Canadian Ethnic Studies Volume XIV, 1 (1982): 44.

system of values that it represents is fragmentary. It is tinted and pleasantly distorted as are the images that Sandor observes through the kaleidoscope that his uncle Janos offers him as a gift. The kaleidoscope is a symbol of illusion in the novel.[34] It reveals the deceptive and unstable nature of Sandor's values and views of reality.

> "Turn it," his uncle said.
> He turned it. There was a click, and behold, a new world. Another turn and another in a riot of color, like a splintered rainbow; cool, deep-green gems, and frivolous pink ones, water-blue and orange jewels in triangles and squares and crescents glittering and flashing before his eyes, ever changing, ever new.
> (82)

The riot of colours that flashes and glitters before Sandor's eyes dazzles him with its promise of beauty.

The kaleidoscope with its splintered but fantastical vision is symbolically linked to Sandor's view of the English neighbourhood through Marlyn's repetition of colour imagery. Upon his first visit to the neighbourhood Sandor is impressed by the beautiful tint of the sky and the gardens. When Sandor is invited to drink lemonade with Eric, he observes colour patterns very similar to those that he sees through the kaleidoscope.

> He gazed up at the sunlight in bars of gold and green and orange shining through the fabric above him, and looked beyond the horizon of the umbrella rim, and knew that as long as he lived he would only have to close his eyes and this would all come back to him.
> (71)

[34] Ibid., p. 41

Sandor's vision is as unstable as the ever changing images of the kaleidoscope.

Just as one can turn a kaleidoscope and behold a new world, Sandor can adjust his perspective and shift any undesirable perceptions that do not support his interpretation of reality. This is illustrated in a passage describing Mr. Nagy, Sandor's childhood idol, the man that he would like to emulate because he resembles the English that Sandor admires.

> Then Mr. Nagy appeared, a pallid little man--with a mouth, Sandor now recalled with sudden indignation, which Mr. Schwalbe once said reminded him of a toad. That's because he knows Pa don't like Mr. Nagy, he thought. But at the same time he was compelled to admit that there was some truth in Schwalbe's sneer that Mr. Nagy looked dusty! He had the feeling that if Mr. Nagy were ever to go out in a strong wind he would come back clean, except for his nose. There, the dust seemed to have settled permanently in little nodules under the skin, making it knobby and shapeless. But that didn't matter very much since Mr. Nagy always reminded him, when looked at from the side, of that picture of a Roman emperor in his Latin reader. Sideways, his nose looked fierce and splendid.
>
> (27)

Sandor conveniently shifts his point of view so that Mr. Nagy becomes the embodiment of his ideals. "Sideways, his nose looked fierce and splendid." Rather than acknowledge the true picture of Mr. Nagy, Sandor builds a flattering image that is only an appearance. He ignores Mr. Nagy's dustiness which is symbolic of the decay of the materialistic world. For Sandor, Mr. Nagy's office is the seat of wealth and power. In reality, it is a prison that isolates its inmates from any meaningful contact with society. Mr. Nagy

never leaves his office. He sleeps in a tiny back room that is tomblike and suffocating. Sandor, through his pursuit of material success, will remain trapped in the same office when he goes to work for Mr. Nagy as a young man.

Sandor's relationship to Uncle Janos illustrates once again how Sandor adjusts his perspective. When Sandor's uncle first steps off the train in Winnipeg Sandor associates him with the mass of foreigners that he feels contempt for. "Onkel Janos, Sandor thought, with a sinking heart. He was unshaven; he wore a collarless shirt and a green jacket that looked as though it had been part of a uniform." (78) Uncle Janos is unacceptable because Sandor judges him by the clothes that he is wearing. However, once his uncle improves his appearance, Sandor is impressed by him. "He was tall and elegantly dressed. There was an air of distinction about him. . . . It was a complete transformation. His uncle was a foreigner no longer. He reminded Sandor of the men in the hotel lobby." (79) Sandor can now admire his uncle for he looks like an English millionaire in his new suit.

Sandor's propensity to avoid any warning signals that might perturb his views is also demonstrated in his attitude towards Frau Kleinholtz, the rich widow that his uncle marries. Sandor's pragmatism overrides any feelings of revulsion that he experiences toward her. He finds out soon enough, like his uncle, that he must placate her in order to benefit financially. Like Mr. Nagy, Frau Klein-

holtz is a symbol of decay and the death-like imagery connected with her reveal the aridity of the values she represents. "He imagined that Frau Kleinholtz had died and been buried, but had somehow revived and set up housekeeping in her tomb." (95) Frau Kleinholtz is forbidding and dangerous.

> From the corners of her mouth two deep furrows ran vertically down her chin. And this part of her face, between the furrows always reminded him of a trap door, hinged at the bottom and likely to spring open at any moment to expose a gullet that would swallow him wholly. (94)

Despite his initial impressions, Sandor persuades Frau Kleinholtz to buy Mr. Nagy's agency and thus does indeed become trapped.

Sandor's uncle Janos, reduced by the dream of material success, is also trapped by Frau Kleinholtz. The spiritless and destructive effects of his association with her are illustrated by the transformations that take place in his character. Before he was married to Frau Kleinholtz Uncle Janos was a life-loving, warm and spirited individual with a booming voice. After his marriage, and through his association with his powerful witch-like wife he loses his zestful and youthful outlook and becomes a debilitated victim who takes to drinking in order to escape his tragic situation. Sandor must often rescue him during his drinking bouts.

> He looked up as his uncle staggered in. Only yesterday, it seemed, he had seen him lithe and buoyant, his

> most trivial actions invested with inimitable grace. Now he sat there, a fat, ungainly man in a drunken stupor, his eyes dull and empty, his features bloated. (131)

Frau Kleinholtz's destructive power is finally unleashed on Sandor's uncle when in a fit of anger over his mismanagement of her funds, she throws a pot of lye off him. Uncle Janos' dreadful fate anticipates Sandor's own plight at the end of the novel for both men sacrifice themselves to the same system.

Sandor begins his adult life in Part II of the novel. At the end of Part I he feels that his aspirations for the future are strengthened and confirmed by the Horatio Alger story he finds under the toilet's floorboards. He feels gratified that he should be proved right by a book.

> The irony here is that the book provides no proof whatsoever. It is simply a sentimental Puritan fantasy about the material rewards that accrue to honesty and hard labour. Sandor drinks in the illusion because it promises success. . . . Ironically he is "subtly and deeply" satisfied by shallow rhetoric. A book, a traditional symbol of enlightenment and the search for truth reinforces Sandor's old illusions and strengthens his resolve to succeed in a superficial world.[35]

In Part II of the novel Sandor works hard to succeed and to become a member of the elite business fraternity.

To begin his new life Sandor changes his name to Alex Hunter. The name that had caused him such pain and embarrassment as a boy is replaced by one that symbolizes the active and dominating role that Sandor would like to play.

[35] Ibid., p. 46.

> But giving up the name of Hunyadi is deeply ironic because Hunyadi was the name of two Hungarian heroes, father and son. Janos Hunyadi was the leader of the Christian forces that defeated the Turks in the Battle of Belgrade in 1456. His younger son, Matyas, was elected King of Hungary in 1458. As Matthias Corvinus he became the embodiment of the Renaissance ruler, protecting learning and science and establishing "the Corvina," one of the finest librairies in Europe. So Sandor's own surname is rich in heroic and royal connotations which are his by right.[36]

By rejecting his name Sandor rejects his heritage and the humanistic values dear to his father. By disregarding this part of himself he denies himself the opportunity to evolve as a complete being. He adopts the values of the world of commerce and assumes a false identity.

The parallel structure of the two parts of the novel is used to expose the illusions that Sandor upholds. As Part Two unfolds, everything that Sandor has put his faith in crumbles. The only things that survive in the chaos that envelops him at the end of the novel are the things he has scoffed at and are here represented by his father's family and Uncle Janos. This illustrates the importance of his father's humanistic vision and the isolating consequences of Sandor's adherence to materialistic values. Symbolic of the vitality of the father's view is the red geranium that flourishes against all odds in the grim surroundings of Henry Avenue. The portrayal of Henry Avenue in the novel reflects the dichotomy between the father's view and Sandor's

[36] Ildiko de Papp Carrington, "From 'Hunky' to Don Juan: The Changing Hungarian Identity in Canadian Fiction," Canadian Literature 89 (Summer 1981): 35.

view of life.

> Totally convincing in its own right, it is also profoundly symbolic, a paradoxical inversion of our normal vision, revealing the vitality of community and the sterility of organization. In the context of the novel, Henry Avenue, blighted though it may be, is the garden of life while the parklands and towers of commerce bear only the fruit of death.[37]

In the first half of the novel Mr. Nagy is Sandor's idol. In Part Two Sandor goes to work for him and learns much from his employer's methods of doing business. He erroneously assumes, however, that he will be Mr. Nagy's heir. The old man has contemptuously decided to sell his business without any regard for Sandor. The imagery used to describe Nagy in this part of the novel announces Sandor's fate as a victim.

> But there was something about him, in the way he sat there, his body tensed as though ready to spring, his hands with their thick yellow nails, half-closed and twitching on his knees--something in the moist red lips and the white glistening teeth that reminded him of an old, lean and hungry wolf. One could almost hear those teeth cutting through bone and tissue, and hear them crunch as they bit into their victim.

Sandor has been able to keep Mr. Nagy's business by managing it for his rich aunt. Once he learns of the crash and its detrimental effect on the business he tries to find Mr. Nagy and seek his advice. Mr. Nagy however, is dead and he has left all his money to realize an ambitious project. On

[37] Eli Mandel, "Introduction," Under the Ribs of Death, p. 13.

viewing the blueprints of this project Sandor mistakenly deduces that Nagy has left his money to build a church. In fact the money is to be used to build an extravagant mausoleum in honor of himself. Because of the economic crash Sandor ironically pleads with Mr. Nagy's lawyer to let him build the mausoleum. However it is the lawyer himself who will dedicate his life to this enterprise. Sandor's desperation prevents him from recognizing the cruel irony of his situation. Even after death, his mentor victimizes and ridicules him. Sandor pays heavily for his association with this figure of decay.

Sandor's idyllic view of the English neighbourhood is shattered in the second part of the novel. The harsh reality of the economic crash has not spared the people that Sandor used to work for as a boy. Selling baskets to earn a few dollars for his wife and son, Sandor returns to one of the homes he worked in.

> He saw it again, empty and deserted, its windows like dark empty eyes through which the spirit had fled, gaping with the vacancy of death; the garden in the back choked with weeds grown strong with life they drew from the flowers rotting below.
>
> (213)

The paradise that Sandor once admired is now a lifeless and deserted place.

The same fate is reserved for Sandor's English-Canadian business associates. At the end of the novel he finds them drunk and huddled together in the boiler room of their building, contemplating their defeat. "The men before

him were sitting on stuffed burlap bags, he noticed, and upon peering more closely he saw that they were filled to overflowing with discarded invoices and letters, soiled with damp and dust, and faded at the edges." (204) Sandor has come full circle. As a young boy he was acquainted with the boiler room his father worked in and was filled with revulsion at his father's connection with it. He vows to adopt the ways of the English to escape this humiliation. At the end of the novel the English end up in the very same place whereas Sandor's father manages to survive.

The values of brotherhood and community that Sandor's father has upheld throughout the novel and has tried to hand down to his son have helped him to survive the economic crash while Sandor is reduced to living in a rat-infested slum with his wife and child. Sandor has refused to adopt his father's attitudes and whenever he has felt the slightest sympathy for people in his business dealings he has done his best to stamp out what he considers a weakness.

> Suddenly and unexpectedly a wave of pity came over him. And this was not the first time in his business dealings that he had felt it. Something soft within him that he had tried again and again to crush. He had never felt it so strongly. From my blood, he thought wildly. Where else? Not from my head. He had heard about such things. His father's blood in his veins, carrying this weakness--his father's lifelong concern for people, handed on to his son.
>
> (179)

Sandor's dread concerning his father's principles being transmitted to him is highly ironic for he considers in a

negative light concerns that are positive and life-affirming. Sandor does not fail because he is an immigrant's son. He fails because he is too full of illusions and puts his faith in what can only bring destruction.

There is no possible reconciliation between the father's view and Sandor's. They are diametrically opposed. When, at the end of the novel, Sandor is left penniless, the father reiterates his views on buying and selling. To Sandor's "what's wrong with buying and selling?" he answers,

> Nothing . . . in its place, nothing at all. A simple and necessary thing. But only a small thing in a man's life--not his whole existence--not an end in itself--not a way of life or a source of one's belief's. And this is what it has become. A tragic joke, to make a religion of it.
> (216)

For the father this philosophy leads to spiritual death. Sandor is its victim and he has suffered not only spiritual death but economic failure also. Sandor will not admit the failure of the system that has betrayed him. He is not enlightened at the end of the novel for he still clings to his materialistic philosophy.

> This way of life his father condemned had taken him to the very threshold of everything he had hoped to achieve. But how could he explain, how tell his father that without it there was nothing left to him? He had started with nothing at all but the belief that this could be accomplished, and if he had not succeeded the fault lay with him and not with what he believed in.
> (216)

The novel, however, does not end on this negative note. It offers hope through Sandor's son who might perhaps serve as

a mediator between Sandor and his father. "I can't leave my fiction with emptiness; it doesn't satisfy me. In Sandor Hunyadi you have a deformed father, but there is hope in the son, in the next generation."[38]

There is hope also in the example of Sandor's father and Uncle Janos. They are not the failures Margaret Atwood considers them to be in Survival. In discussing the novel she equates them with Sandor, though on a lesser scale.

> Two other failures parallel his: that of his father who feels Sandor can achieve "success"--which for him is intellectual or spiritual success--without abandoning the gentle old-world ethic he himself believes in; and that of his Onkel Janos, who sells his soul by marrying a rich old woman he doesn't love and who mutilates him literally. Neither of these failures is as great as Sandor's--his father retains his integrity though he remains poor, and Onkel Janos breaks away from his evil wife and attains happiness with another woman (though he too must remain poor).[39]

These two figures are not failures in the novel. They are life-affirming characters and they offer a positive and redemptive vision that is the lesson that Sandor has been unable to learn. Uncle Janos, though he has flirted with destruction, has managed to liberate himself from Frau Kleinholtz. He regains the energy and verve he formerly had. Sandor sees him working at the neighbourhood theatre.

> He joked and laughed, and the customers coming in laughed too, perhaps at his accent, perhaps at his gestures; but ah, my God, the naive, loud splendour of

[38] John Marlyn, "An Interview with John Marlyn," p. 40.

[39] Margaret Atwood, Survival (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 153.

> him as he stood there, his eyes flashing, his great voice booming, the flanges of his nostrils quivering, and all in passionate enjoyment of what? Merely of living, of being with people and talking to them.
>
> (211)

This image of Uncle Janos enjoying life, enjoying the company of people, is one that remains with us for a long time. Both he and his brother-in-law offer us a positive vision that counterbalances the negative and isolating effects of Sandor's vision.

Chapter III

An Apocalypse: Son of a Smaller Hero and Peace Shall Destroy Many

In Son of a Smaller Hero and Peace Shall Destroy Many the protagonists undertake a more conscious and questioning search of their place in society. Irony in these two novels is generated by the distance between the protagonist and his limiting environment. It permits the unveiling of contradictions necessary for the protagonist's apprehension of the truth and is instrumental to the understanding of his relation to the wider society. In Son of a Smaller Hero the contrasting attitudes of irony and affection help Noah to realize that he must leave the ghetto to reject isolation, but he need not deny his whole cultural past. In Peace Shall Destroy Many Thom Wiens gains a greater understanding of the country he lives in. This is achieved by his discovery of the ironies involved in Deacon Block's leadership and its imposition of a diminished concept of brotherhood that isolates Thom and his Mennonite brethren from meaningful contact with the wider society. As in The Rich Man and The Luck of Ginger Coffey, discovery is triggered by a violent or dramatic incident. In Son of a Smaller Hero Wolf Adler's death provides the explanations necessary to Noah and the impetus to continue his search. In Peace

<u>Shall Destroy Many</u> the fight in the barn ironically brings enlightenment to Thom and allows him to conclude his search. Both characters are essentially observers, but through the result of the process of self-discovery are released into action.

Son of a Smaller Hero relates Noah Adler's attempt to define himself by leaving the Jewish ghetto of Montreal. He experiences much inner confusion and doubt for he does not possess a clear cut idea of how to achieve this. Noah has "a vital longing for a clear identity which will free him from inner anxiety and doubt and reconcile him to the two fundamental facts of his existence--born a Jew and growing up in Canada."[40] In the novel Noah vacillates between the Jewish and Gentile worlds. Richler uses the protagonist to reveal the tension, hypocrisy and duplicities, that lie behind the apparent respectability in both these worlds.

The protagonist is at odds with his environment, but at the same time he sees that he cannot define himself by simply leaving the ghetto. The author's ambivalent attitudes of irony and affection towards the ghetto are shared by Noah and help him to gain a sense of self. Noah is continually drawn to and pulled away from the ghetto in a pattern that is evident in literature depicting the Jewish ghetto.

> The centripetal and centrifugal forces on either side of the ghetto walls are matched by pulls toward and away from historical roots as well as by contrasting

[40] F. M. Birbalsingh, "Mordecai Richler and the Jewish Canadian Novel," Journal of Commonwealth Literature 7, no.1 (June 1972): 74.

attitudes of irony and affection.[41]

Irony permits the distancing necessary to effect discovery. Affection permits reconciliation with positive elements. On one level, the ghetto is a garrison for those who let it protect and determine their attitudes and ways of seeing. On another level it can be transcended and its positive elements used in a more integrative vision. It is the latter that both Noah Adler and Richler would like to achieve.

Northrop Frye's garrison metaphor can be used to describe the ghetto in the novel. "Frye's closely knit and beleaguered society with its unquestionable moral and social values also characterizes the ghetto."[42] In Son of a Smaller Hero the garrison contains the members of Noah's family and community. It is an enclave that possesses its own rules of solidarity and fierce loyalties and determines behaviour. In Noah's eyes his grandfather, Melech Adler, is the embodiment of the garrison that he must escape. Melech rules his family with an iron hand and is respected, though not loved, in the community. The family lives in a cage and Melech is their ruler.[43] At family meetings his word is law and no one dares confront him openly except his son Max. Noah feels confined and stifled within the walls of the cage.

[41]Michael Greenstein, "Beyond the Ghetto and the Garrison: Jewish-Canadian Boundaries," Mosaic Volume XIV,2: 129.

[42]Ibid., p. 121

[43]Mordecai Richler, Son of a Smaller Hero 1955; rpt. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p. 36. Further references to this edition will be in the text.

Noah is Melech's favorite grandson, the only one he feels he can trust, the only one he would leave money to. ". . . he had approached Noah, the first of his grandchildren, with kindness. Noah had responded by attaching himself to his grandfather like a shadow, leaning dreamily before him down the street and allowing no other to carry his prayer shawl." (15) This idyllic relationship is shattered when Noah, at the age of eleven, discovers his grandfather's methods of doing business. Noah's father and an employee hide a few sacks of scrap metal and Noah, not understanding that he is required to keep silent, tells his grandfather in the presence of the man who brought them. Because Noah has spoken, and has questioned the unwritten laws of the ghetto, he is rejected by his grandfather and a growing tension comes to characterize their relationship. Noah's active desire to seek his place in a wider world contrasts with Melech's rigid patriarchal stance. Entrenched behind the walls of the ghetto, Melech distrusts the Gentiles whom he feels are encroaching upon his territory.

Ironically Melech is not the pillar of strength and respectability that the community sees. Behind the facade lies the memory of his youthful infatuation with a gentile girl. "Helga has blond hair and walks straight. She claps her hands together when she dances." (35) Melech does not break with tradition for he listens to his father and gives up Helga. Noah has an affair with a gentile woman and thus

experience does not create a bond but rather a rift between grandson and grandfather, for Melech uses his righteousness as an armour. It is this intractability that pulls Noah away from his family and the ghetto.

The garrison provides security for those who accept its rules. Noah is rejected by his family because he refuses to follow blindly the dictates that they have lived with. As a young boy he runs away from home and later marches in political demonstrations. According to his father this is something that is not done by Jews. During the war he tries to enlist and even threatens to denounce his relatives for war profiteering. His relatives do not understand how one Jew could inform on another.

Noah feels that he does not want to live his life by adhering to these clannish rules. "Noah realized that he had come to the end of something, and that he and the family could not meet again except as strangers suspicious of one another." (37) Noah cannot be something or serve something he no longer believes in. He had experienced this same feeling of alienation when attending a meeting of the local youth group and the speaker, a Polish Jew, spoke about Israel. Noah does not stay till the end of the meeting and when the group begins to dance, expressing its solidarity and unity, Noah is unable and unwilling to keep step. Rather than stay and be stifled he slips outside. This action reveals Noah's need to explore the wider world around him, the need to have the freedom to search for new rules or new

ways of seeing.

Noah leaves the ghetto and goes to live on his own. His sojourn with the Halls is short-lived but very significant for Noah learns that this Gentile environment can be as stifling as the Jewish one he left. Noah is thankful for Theo Hall's attention because Theo introduces him to the world of books and music to which he did not have access before. "He saw Theo as a kind of hero. His talk drugged him." (46) However Theo's motives are not purely altruistic. He is not satisfied with his teaching job and his attempts to edit a literary magazine are not rewarded with success. Richler deflates his pretensions by saying that among smart people his magazine (Direction) was known as No Direction. Theo's attitude towards Noah while on the surface friendly enough, is patronizing and Noah often feels that he is being displayed as a specimen. Theo tries to get him to talk about his family for he thinks it colourful.

Richler's ironic tone in describing and talking about Theo reveals the character's mediocrity. There is no spontaneity in Theo's life. He keeps sheets of paper tacked to his desk indicating what he must do: the books he must read, the music he must listen to. He does not have time for unscheduled pleasures. This rigid compartmentalized existence contrasts with Noah's uncertainties. Theo is really a novitiate. "His smile was wan, condescending, like the smile of a novitiate showing a group of peasants through St. Peter's." (42) Theo's assumed role as Noah's guide is

ironic for Theo does not know much about the world. He is much too wrapped up in his own circumscribed concerns and unaware of his inadequacies.

George Woodcock comments on Miriam's role as catalyst "in the difficult process of understanding his environment, and thereby understanding and liberating himself."[44] It is through Miriam that Noah enters into the world of the Goyim. When Theo discovers that Noah and Miriam are having an affair, Noah gains a further insight into the new world he has entered by observing Theo's, as well as Miriam's reactions. Both try to hide what has happened and camouflage it with a lie. Noah refuses to play the role that is offered him.

> Noah faced Theo firmly, refusing, beforehand, to play the role that was being offered to him so blatantly. To apologize, agree that they had been drunk, and then, afterwards, to go ahead with a surreptitious affair. "You may make love to my wife as long as I don't see you and you don't tell." He sensed that Miriam and Theo were united against him in the same way as Melech and Wolf had joined forces much earlier. Wolf had said: "You can go without a hat. Eat ham. But not in front of Zeyda." Perhaps, Noah thought, eating ham was not so unimportant after all. Surely this society has as little veracity, if more novelty, than the one I have sprung from.
>
> (105-106)

The two societies are not as diametrically opposed as Noah might have thought when he first moved out, or as the members of the ghetto also think when they continually criticize the Gentiles. Both societies elaborate rules and facades to sidestep the truths that are too difficult to

[44]George Woodcock, Mordecai Richler (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), p. 22.

be acknowledged. By running away from the ghetto Noah does not run into a ready-made world in which there is a place for him. Richler criticizes what is wrong with both the Jewish and Gentile worlds through Noah's gradual awareness.

Miriam also serves to reveal certain aspects of Noah's character. In the way he treats Miriam we discover that he can be as ruthless as he feels is necessary in his search, and that he is not only the victim of oppression. According to Miriam, "He seemed to move from one experience to another assuredly leaving what was no longer useful behind him without regret or sentiment." (128) She also accuses him of behaving badly towards his parents. In fact his father, Wolf Adler, is quite aware of his son's low opinion of him. His mother, albeit a very possesive woman, does indeed have a heart condition and Noah's leaving at the end of the novel precipitates her death.

Schloime Adler, Noah's uncle, inadvertently reveals an aspect of his character that ties him to the ghetto. Schloime is a petty thief and is responsible for the break-in at Panofsky's store. In his handling of the situation and his rejection of Schloime, Noah ironically displays the same contempt and righteousness that is characteristic of his grandfather. " 'You know what,' Schloime said getting off the bed. 'You remind me of Paw.' Noah stared at him horrified," (84) Noah cannot accept this statement for Melech represents everything Noah would like to escape from. He does not realize here that he cannot really leave every-

thing behind. His uncle Schloime is also a rebel, but he is very destructive. It is through his thirst for revenge that his father's office is burned and that his brother dies. Unlike Noah he does not see that, "It's not enough to rebel, to destroy. It is necessary to say yes to something." (29)

Noah's attitude to the ghetto is ambivalent. He has left it but he is continually drawn back to it either through memories or by actually returning there when he is working as a taxi driver. The ghetto represents both oppression and security to him. This reflects Richler's own attitude, for Noah is in many ways Richler's spokesman and reflection. This sense of attraction and repulsion can be found in the experience of Jewish writers in other cultures.

> The threat within the ghetto walls, which, like laws, are meant to be breached--may be as devastating as outside dangers: and the artist, the individual par excellence, stands against the ghetto's suffocation in a religion that places great value on the community both through worship and social commitments. Jewish life is with people, but art requires a room of one's own. Hence, the frequent sense of rebellion and ambivalent love-hate relationships found in the Jewish writer.[45]

Noah experiences this in the novel and although he is not a writer, his interest in literature and his leaving for Europe parallel Richler's development and we can thus assume that he will be involved in some type of artistic activity. Throughout the novel there is a sense of sympathy and compassion towards the inhabitants of the ghetto even while they are being satirized and ridiculed.

[45] Michael Greenstein, "Beyond the Ghetto and the Garrison," p. 123.

Once he has moved away, Noah seems to see the ghetto in a different light. It loses its harshness and rigidity when contemplated from a distance.

> Seen from a distance, it seemed full of tender possibilities, anachronistic but beautiful. Melech, at worst was a dedicated man, not without love for his family. . . . The house on St Dominic Street, stifling as he had found it, is also rich in warmth and humour. All the dictums of the ghetto seemed unworthy of contempt in retrospect. I'll miss them, he thought.
> (29)

The ghetto is not only a source of oppression. Noah realizes that it has also nurtured and protected him, and given him warmth and love. His memories of it are not all negative. He remembers fondly his escapades with his friends. He remembers time spent at the beach and the raucous behaviour of the Jewish people there and the complaints of the French-Canadians. Feeling lonely and a stranger in his new world "he walked over to the ghetto and tramped down the streets of his past, looking into poolrooms and fruit stores. . . . He wanted, all at once, to squeeze Melech, Wolf and Leah, Panofsky, Max, to his breast and consume them with his love." (97) Unlike Schloime, Noah's rebellion is not destructive. Sentimentality, however, is not an acceptable gateway to understanding and analysis.

For Noah, Richler's spokesman, irony becomes a shield against sentimentality.[46] The central ironic incident in the novel is Wolf Adler's consecration as a hero. This enables Noah to effectuate a final assessment of his ghetto world and

[45] Ibid., p. 129.

permits a further distancing. "Wolf Adler's death is the central incident which exposes the whole pattern of private rebellion that has spread its roots through the life of the Adler family."[46] Melech is losing his power. His son Schlomo has caused the fire that kills Wolf. His daughter Ida has been openly defiant towards him. Noah has moved away. Wolf, Melech's son, has often dreamt of his father's death. Given this context, the rabbi's praise of Melech at the funeral is highly ironic and serves to demonstrate the patterns of deceit that riddle the ghetto.

> The father of the departed, Melech Adler, is well aware of the need of God. A devout Jew, Mr. Adler has been a pillar of the community for many years. This is a sad day for him, but a proud one too. He has brought up his children in the tradition of the Torah and one of them, the oldest, has died for the Torah.
>
> (154)

The reader knows that Melech has created God in his own image, as is often repeated in the novel, and has retreated behind this to justify his righteousness and his cowardliness in his relationship with Noah and Helga, the gentile girl. One of the reasons that he cannot accept Noah is that the latter has shown more courage in assuming his convictions and has refused to play the deceitful games that hide the truth. Wolf, his son, has died for money, not for the Torah. His gesture exposes Melech's secret. It is through the contents of the box for which Wolf dies that Noah discovers the truth about his grandfather.

[46] George Woodcock, Mordecai Richler, p. 23.

When alive, Wolf Adler had been a mediocre and ineffectual man. Not successful like his other brothers, he dreams of the day he will take over his father's business. The iron box that his father so jealously guards is the object of his reveries. Wolf often leans back in his chair to brood about how much money is in the box for he feels that since his father lets no one see it, it must contain money. The fact that he is proclaimed a hero is doubly ironic, for he is too simple-minded and insignificant to be chosen as a hero, and he only went into the fire to save the box because he thought it contained money, not the Torah. Noah discovers just how insignificant his life has been when he finds Wolf's diary. It records such vital things as the number of steps he takes in a day, the amount of time wasted on sleeping or in the toilet.

Juxtaposing this private tragedy and hidden truth is a very public, and comic appropriation of Wolf's death. The search for his body amid the debris becomes an event attended by crowds of onlookers that the police must survey. Richler's treatment of the scene is comic, and highlights the foibles of the inhabitants of the ghetto. It is a very hot day, and the local store is making money by selling cokes. Noah's uncle Itzik is only concerned about appearances and hands his nephew a skull-cap. Since nothing exciting seems to be happening people indulge in small talk. When the body is found, Noah opens the box and removes some letters and pictures. Because there are a few scrolls in the box, a rumour is start-

ed that is soon accepted as truth: Wolf Adler died for the Torah.

The funeral is attended by a crowd of mourners that have no qualms about appropriating Wolf's death for their own ends, especially Max Adler, Wolf's brother, who plans to use it in his campaign to be elected as member of parliament. Max goes as far as to pay off an employee who knows the truth. Rabbi Fishman makes a speech praising Wolf and his family and we discover that Max has payed for the speech and that "Fishman was sincere out of necessity. He believed in God as an insurance salesman believes in Prudential." (151)

Richler peels away layer upon layer of deceit. After his father's death Noah spends some time with relatives on his mother's side of the family, the Goldenbergs. This family, who on the surface seems a normal and upstanding Canadian family, also has its ways of sidestepping the truth. The father seems to be devoted to all the right causes but he appears to be collecting points. Noah's aunt Rachel is a model wife, but she secretly reads pornographic literature. The son, Harvey, as Noah discovers is a repressed homosexual. Although the family knows this, they refuse to really face it. When Noah brings it out in the open the family is scandalized and he is alienated from them. The defense mechanisms that Noah had witnessed with the Halls are in evidence here also.

The box reveals the truth about Noah's grandfather. In it Noah finds old photographs of Melech with Helga, as

well as letters that have been written and not posted. One of them was written as recently as three days before the fire. Noah comes to understand that his grandfather has also suffered and this renders him more human and accessible. "Oh, Melech, Noah thought. My poor suffering Zeyda." (160) Noah realizes how hard it must have been for Melech to keep this to himself all this time. Melech also gives Noah a gift. Before going to Europe, Noah returns the box and asks his grandfather if Wolf knew what was in it. Melech rebels against the idea that Noah will come to respect Wolf, a man who had died for a cash box. However, he lies for Noah's sake and tells him that his father knew that he had scrolls in the box but he did not know about the other things in it. Noah takes one of his grandfather's scrolls. This final gesture indicates that Noah understands his cultural past and he no longer considers it a burden.

Noah's decision to leave for Europe, is not an escape but a way of further widening his horizons. According to Janet Bitton's analysis, "leaving the family is a recoiling from all structures, and therefore, from all society."[47] Noah however, realizes that though he may leave, the ghetto has become internalized, and will forever be a part of him and his identity. "I am going and I'm not going. I can no more leave you, my mother, or my father's memory than I can renounce myself." (203) At the same time Noah feels he can no longer stay and be a part of the deception he has seen.

[47]Janet Bitton, "The Canadian 'Ethnic' Novel," p. 65.

Noah's leaving manifests a dynamic and ongoing process of discovery. Noah is stretching his vision to include the larger world, he is not recoiling from society. This is opposed to his grandfather's static position, who though he seems to have forgiven Noah, retreats defensively behind the partiarchal attitude that is disappearing even in the ghetto world. "Each man creates God in his own image. Melech's God, who was stern, sometimes just, and always without mercy, would reward him and punish the boy. Melech could count on that." (205) Noah can venture out into the world for he has faced himself and come to terms with his cultural past, making it thus a part of his future. The novel's ending supports Hugo McPherson's contention that Richler belongs in society.

> . . . Richler's spirit resembles that of the . . . "angry" young Englishman and the "beat writers of the great American night"; but though, like them he strips away the world's pretences, he does not end as an outsider, in alienated or intoxicated freedom. Richler belongs (as Brian Moore does) in society and he has enough verve to refuse alienation.[48]

Noah is not recoiling from society, he is recoiling from the isolation that a prolonged sojourn in the ghetto would bring.

[48]Hugo McPherson, "Fiction: 1940-1960," p. 225.

Peace Shall Destroy Many presents Thom Wiens' quest for truth in the Mennonite community of Wapiti. "To see Thom as the leading character of the book is essential to understanding it. Without that the book is a study of disintegration, with it a quest for truth, wherever it may be."[49] Thom slowly distances himself from his restrictive community. His quest is a genuine questioning of received values and beliefs. Like the Book of Daniel from which the quotation that prefaces the novel is taken, Peace Shall Destroy Many is an apocalypse for it uncovers or unveils the truth. Through the disintegration of Deacon Block's reign over the Wapiti community, Thom learns the true meaning of peace. Block's concept of peace leads to the ironic results alluded to in the title of the novel. The ironies revealed through Block's prominent place in Wapiti point out to Thom the true meaning of his Christian faith.

"The novel's theme is as much freedom and brotherhood as peace, but these are all aspects of the same thing in Wiebe's Christian myth."[50] By the end of the novel, Thom discovers that these concepts cannot be practised in the isolation that both Block and the community have advocated. They

[49]Rudy Wiebe, "An Author Speaks About His Novel," in A Voice in the Land, ed. W. J. Keith (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981), p. 65.

[50]Patricia Morley, The Comedians (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1977), p. 70.

must be given form by an opening-up of the community to the people that inhabit the land that has sheltered them from the oppression they once knew in Russia. For Thom this means that the Métis that have been so mistreated by Block, must be included in an integrative vision of peace and brotherhood. To live his faith Thom must go beyond interpretations of tradition that Block has given to the community. It is through Christ's actual teachings that he can affirm his faith and discover the true meaning of peace.

The quotation that prefaces the novel is taken from the Book of Daniel and alludes to the character of Deacon Block in the novel.

> And in the latter time, a king
> shall stand up.
> And his power shall be mighty
> and he shall prosper.
> And he shall magnify himself in his heart,
> and by peace shall destroy many
> But he shall be broken without hand.[51]

It points to his status in Napiti (a king), to the effect of his appropriation of power (shall destroy many), and to the consequence of his actions (shall be broken without hand). Through his narrow concept of peace and the repressive control he exercises over the Mennonites Block causes the explosive scene in the barn at the end of the novel and is broken by the contradictions that have characterized his life.

It is also significant that the quotation is taken

[51] Rudy Wiebe, Peace Shall Destroy Many 1962; rpt. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), p. XI. Further references to this edition will be in the text.

from the Book of Daniel for it offers the context for an interpretation of the novel.

> The Book of Daniel, like The Revelation in the New Testament is called an apocalypse. . . Apocalypse means unveiling. When wickedness seemed supreme in the world, and evil powers were dominant, an apocalypse was given to show the real situation behind that which was apparent, and to indicate the eventual victory of righteousness upon the earth.[52]

The novel, then, is an apocalypse in the sense that it reveals what is hidden behind the apparently peaceful and Christian facade of Wapiti. In the novel, the community has strayed from Christ's original message of peace and brotherhood. It has elected to follow a passive interpretation through a virtual isolation. Through Thom's questioning, a more vital and actual sense of His message is arrived at. Block's power with its wicked manipulation of others is broken and replaced by an opening-up of the community to the outside world.

At the beginning of the novel Thom's harmony with his community and its beliefs is symbolized by the pleasure that he takes in plowing the land, an occupation that has characterized the Mennonite way of life for hundreds of years.

> Pulling his feet up hard with each step he sensed within himself the strength of his forefathers who had plowed and subdued the earth before him. He, like them, was working out God's promise that man could eat his bread in the sweat of his face, not pushing a button to watch a divine creation blaze to earth.
>
> (12)

[52]Introduction to the Book of Daniel in the New Scofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 896.

This elemental need for contact with the land is connected to Thom's need to feel himself a part of the traditions and beliefs of his people. He considers his beliefs to be the only true way to conduct one's life. He firmly adheres to the sermons that are delivered at church services. These sermons profess the importance of spiritual love. It must be proferred to everyone even those who hate or who are indifferent. Thom admires the strength of Peter Block, the pioneer of the Wapiti community. For Thom he is a "rock in the whirlpool of the Canadian world." (21) It is Block who has established the community and it is he that is its leader.

Wapiti is a garrison for the Mennonites. They live secluded from the outside world and do not associate with the English who live far away or the Métis, whom they call half-breeds, and who live closer to them. The Mennonites have tried to recreate the society they had in Russia.

> Unlike immigrants to the United States, which exists by virtue of an historical caesura, newcomers to Canada are neither absolved nor relieved of their participation in the world they left behind. . . . They have come with their memories and they have tried to reconstruct the past, an alien past, as it should have been rather than as it was, and often they have done so without regard for the Canadian place where they have relocated. [53]

When Block had founded the restricted Mennonite settlement in the 1930's, in order to flee the ghosts and obsessions that haunted him in Russia, he had bought out the English and ten years later there are only four Métis families left.

[53] John Moss, Patterns of Isolation, p. 80.

The use of German among the Mennonites also serves to isolate them from the people around them. The isolation is maintained by Deacon Block who is the only one who ventures out of the community for business reasons. The inhabitants of Wapiti rely on him for their interpretation of a world unknown to them. "The men agreed on all matters, their opinions on any occurence outside their own community being formed in general surveys of one Mennonite German weekly and by what Deacon Block told them." (29) Thom's gradual questioning of Block's position accompanies his coming into manhood and unveils the truth.

Though the community is isolated, the outside world still makes its presence felt. Wiebe establishes this in the very first pages of the novel by presenting the two aspects of the wider world that Thom must deal with in order to strengthen his faith and counter Block's restrictive tenets. These two aspects are the war that Canada is involved in and the presence of the Métis near Wapiti. Even as Thom plows the fields, "the yellow planes passed overhead swiftly and in thunder." (11) In addition to this the radio reports what is happening in War-torn Europe. Between the weather and crop reports are blurted the statistics of the people who are being killed.

For Thom and the Mennonites this aspect of the outside world is symbolized by one of their own--Hank Unger. The latter is a Mennonite who has completely refused the Mennonite pacifist stance. He is a pilot who delights in

telling how he shoots down enemy soldiers. "When I shoot down a Nazi pig, it's strictly fun for me, only one question crosses my mind, watchin' them make that slow loop down, as they blaze. Will he blow or fry?" (223). Unger's colloquial style as well as his crudeness demonstrate the rift that separates him from Thom and the rest of the community.

At the beginning of the novel Hal, Thom's younger brother, is enjoying an outing to capture turtles with his Mètis friend Jackie Lambert. This introduces us to the other aspect of the outside world. Unlike the grownups around him Hal does not see any distinction between his Mennonite and Métis friends. The rest of the community keeps them at a distance and only deals with them for business reasons. They are not allowed to attend church services. When one of the Mennonites, Herman Petkau, marries a Moomsomin girl, the whole community is outraged and this becomes the subject of a community reunion. While Thom is aware of the contradictions involved in the way the Mennonites treat Herman (he had lived by himself for a long time and received very few visits bacause of his status as a bastard son of a Mennonite woman and a Russian man) he cannot accept the idea that Herman has married outside the church.

> Though his reason could formulate small argument why a man, as good as avoided by his community for fourteen years and never visited except by accident, should not return the affection of a woman who, once she heard clearly accepted Christianity and whose keenest delight after thirty years of squalor was to learn more of what Christian living entailed, his conscience reared, violated. Herman said, noting his face darken, "We drove to Hainey when the storm let up and the J. P. married us.

> You're the only Mennonite in Wapiti who knows."
> That had exceeded all limits. To call himself a Christian and be married outside the church. His thinking had bogged, blind to its own illogic. Even now his mind, rebelled blindly.

At this point Thom is unable to draw conclusions from the contradictions that he is beginning to see in the enclosed world of Wapiti. His perception of the world is still governed and filtered through the interpretation of Mennonite teaching that is operant in Wapiti. Wiebe contrasts the very sincere efforts of Herman's Métis wife to learn and live by Christian teachings to the rigid and unbending rules that Thom is a victim of. In order to mature, Thom must face the contradictions and not retreat when his eyes and mind apprehend them.

Presiding over Wapiti is Deacon Block, the man who interprets the Mennonite beliefs and establishes the rules of conduct for the community. The descriptions of Block in the novel connote his intransigence in matters of faith and the emotional aridity in his response to the people around him: "iron hair," "expressionless as granite," "sharp and clean as a knife," "he was as steel in everything he did." He blocks any attempt to question or see experience in a way that is different from the traditions that have been established in the community. Contact with the outside world is frowned upon for it would involve a questioning of inherited behaviour. The outside world is seen as evil. "If the children could be taught just enough to know about the world's evil, they would be happy to remain in their seclusion."

(70) When the Mennonite teacher, Joseph Dueck, threatens this seclusion and breaks with tradition by holding a meeting in English in the presence of the Métis, Block is incensed.

Joseph has questioned the community's stance on isolation and pacifism, but even more reprehensible, he has criticized the Mennonite Church in front of the Métis. "Can one even grasp how unbelievable it is that anyone in this church should make such accusations before--Indians?" (61) Block's attitude towards the Métis will be a major element in the process of discovery that Thom has undertaken. Thom will experience Block's displeasure when he decides to give Bible classes to the Métis. Joseph Dueck raises the contradictions involved in professing love for strangers in countries far away in the context of the war and the refusal to extend love to the Métis who live next door. Joseph cannot reconcile the contradictions that he sees in Wapiti and decides to leave and to join the medical service corps.

Block's relationship to his daughter Elizabeth symbolizes the debilitating effect of his supremacy over the community. Elizabeth is lifeless. She has lost all zest for life, her only purpose is that of beast of burden on her father's farm. ". . . she worked always: the hard drudging labour of men, yet work never seemed to interest her beyond the point of its immediate necessity. As far back as Thom could recall, she had appeared exactly as now, dumpy, uninvolved, oddly wasted." (25) Block has ruled over her existence and prevented her from living a life of her own.

When younger, she had been forbidden to marry Herman Petkau. Block's cruel and heartless treatment of Herman reveals his lack of true Christian feeling and forgiveness. He reveals to Herman that he is a bastard and says, "he would never let his daughter marry the child of a slutty Mennonite and a heathen Russian farmhand." (115) His treatment and rejection of Herman ironically foreshadows his rejection of Elizabeth at the end of the novel, for Elizabeth dies trying to give birth to the bastard son of a farmhand. Block's treatment of Elizabeth is his treatment of the community. If his supremacy is not broken, Wapiti too will become as lifeless as Elizabeth.

Block's status as a religious leader is ironic for behind the granite facade are hidden the memories of some very unchristian actions. As a young man in Russia, and in the turmoil and starvation of the 1920's he hides surplus grain from the others because he selfishly thinks only of his son:"Work for his son was the only religion." (127) He cares little for his neighbours and their children who might die of starvation. When his grain is robbed he kills the thief in a fit of furious anger. Feeling repentant he is driven to work for his community and decides to leave Russia and found a new community in Canada. From the beginning, then, his leadership and authority are tainted with equivocal motivations. A man that has always selfishly worried about his own needs determines what concepts of brotherhood will be followed in the community.

The rigidity of Block's precepts causes the death of his daughter. The dedication to work so fundamental to Block does not redeem Elizabeth's life. His blindness to Elizabeth's state is his blindness to the contradictions of his life and his professed beliefs. When Elizabeth dies in childbirth, carrying the child of Louis Moomsomin, the Métis farmhand that worked on the Block farm, Block is insensitive to Elizabeth's ordeal. He thinks only of his son, Pete, who must never know what happened. The incident must also be hidden from the community. Block arranges to buy out the Moomsomins for "no towel-wrapped bundle on a chair was going to wreck his separated community." (145) His community is indeed a separated community and he himself is the agent for this negative state which he tries to maintain. He is in a sense responsible for Elizabeth's death. In order to mature Thom must confront Block and release his own consciousness and perception of the community.

Thom's gradual awakening and his personal attempt to strengthen and understand his faith begins with the Bible classes he gives to the Métis children.[54] Continuing the

[54]This human interaction is necessary for Thom just as it is necessary for Rudy Wiebe who is a teacher as well as a writer. In an interview conducted by Brian Bergman entitled "Rudy Wiebe: Storymaker of the Prairies" in A Voice in the Land, ed. W. J. Keith (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981), p. 169, the author says, "I can't imagine just holing myself up in a room and just writing, writing, writing. Then I would dry up. You need the kind of stimulus and human interaction that teaching can give you." For Thom interaction with the Métis provides stimulus and opportunities for growth. It permits him to find the true meaning of brotherhood and allows him to test his beliefs.

work that his teacher Joseph Dueck had begun, he discovers the inconsistencies of Block's and the community's stance with regards to their neighbours. On one level, he questions the separatist ideology that Block insists on maintaining and seeks to redefine the concept of brotherhood. On another level, Thom widens his understanding of Canada through the Métis.[55]

> There are stacks of European history books to read, yet the Indians--a people living in nearly half the world--lived here for thousands of years, and we don't know a single thing that happened to them except some old legend muddled in the memory of an old crone. A whole world lost.
>
> (83)

Thom shares this discovery of his country's history with Block's son Pete. However, the latter is not on the same wavelength as Thom and responds by saying that they are not missing much by not knowing the Métis for they are just a bunch of thieves. Thom is incensed by Pete's lack of understanding.

> Relax as he would, Pete's callosity crept ever back into consciousness. For a deep look into a uniqueness of the Canadian world to be blacked out by conventional triviality! So they were missing five chickens! Any silly hen could repair that. It seemed to Thom he had offered

[55]Thom parallels Wiebe's own view and progression from depiction of the restricted Mennonite community to an exploration of the wider society through the depiction of the native people and Métis of Canada in The Temptations of Big Bear and The Scorched Wood People.

In terms of the novel and Wiebe's own progression there is "an expansion from the history of his own people to the history of his land from a formally Christian to a technically non-Christian but none the less visionary and all-embracing view of the world." W. J. Keith, The Art of Rudy Wiebe (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1981), p. 13

> a wide new world they could explore together and his friend had worse than ignored it.
>
> (84)

Thom wants to stretch out and widen his horizons and Pete keeps bringing him back within the narrow confines of Wapiti convention. Their gradual estrangement parallels Thom's dissatisfaction with Block. Unlike Thom, Pete does not question Block's rules. When asked to explain why he has not yet enrolled in the army he repeats what his father has said on the subject. Thom realizes that this is not enough, "it has to go beyond the mere teachings of the fathers." (177) Thom is beginning to have personal responses to issues and feels that one must go back to the teachings of Christ, not stop at the interpretation given by the fathers.

He has applied the same principles in his wish to share the Bible with the Métis children. Block's negative reaction to this mission and his wish to put an end to it opens Thom's eyes to the Deacon's methods. As a result of Elizabeth's "weakness" Block has decided to buy out the Métis. Thom realizes that Block was just pretending to go along with him.

> . . . the year had mined at his beliefs. His eyes on the Deacon's labouring back, he tried to clamp rigid his tightening anger. All these months Block had deigned no mention of his plan, this man handled everyone, Mennonites and half-breed, as if they were pieces of machinery; each pawn had a particular spot in his scheme and each was told what to believe and what to denounce. Each had small significance beyond covering his spot. You there, and you there! Could someone merely be ordered: Believe!
>
> (207)

One cannot be ordered to merely believe, thinks Thom. There

must be a personal interaction with the beliefs and they must be put into action.

Thom's understanding of Block's methods leads him to question his mother about Elizabeth's death. He sees that somehow this is vital to unsnarl his confusion.

> To this point he has unconsciously provided continuity for the subservience of his father and his forbears to arbitrary authority. The struggle now begins in earnest, deep within him, which has been going on for some time at surface level and by which his own roots are established within the Canadian soil.[56]

Once he finds out why Elizabeth died, Thom finally breaks away from Block's powerful hold. He no longer feels that Block can be a worthy leader.

In the light of his discovery Thom wants to completely break away from the community by enrolling when the call comes for him. He feels that he must act to counter the influence that Block had on him. "Behind all this bush, do we have to be the rats of Block and our forefathers? Whenever they jab us, we know what to believe? We don't owe them our souls!" (218) Blindly accepting someone else's rules without question can lead to very negative results. The answer does not lie however, in leaving for war.

On the night of the Christmas pageant Thom finds the path he must follow to affirm his Christianity and his newfound manhood. It is not by going off to war. Hank Unger has demonstrated through his brutality and cruelty that his is not the way. While he recounts his exploits Thom sees

[56]John Moss, Patterns of Isolation, p. 95.

"Above Hank's cropped head, on either side of the starred tip of the trees, . . . the angels' message in bold red: Peace on Earth, Goodwill towards Men. " (223) Thom must discover the meaning of peace and he wonders where the truth lies. Is there only the Block or the Unger way? Block's way of avoidance and suppression leads to defeat as it is symbolized in the barn scene.

In the barn, Block's son finds Razia Tantamount, the school teacher, with Hank Unger after the concert. Pete hits him, the repressed feelings that have been smothered by his father's stern reign come to the fore. A similar response is illicited from Thom when he too strikes at someone to come to Pete's aid. Thom experiences firsthand the ironic results of Block's dogmas. " . . . as into the void of splintered dogmas violence surged to brute strength." (235) Razia sums up the ironic significance of the scene when she says, " . . . all these loving Mennonites smashing.!" (236) When Deacon Block sees what his son has done in response to his own impulses and not according to what he had taught him, he is finally a bereft and broken man. His reign over Wapiti comes to an end.

Ironically it is through the violence of the barn scene that Thom is led to understanding. In thinking over what has happened he finds the answer in the Christmas play at the pageant. Jackie Labret, Hal's Métis friend, points the way to the Christ child and to the Three Kings. This act ties together the social and religious themes of the

novel. It is significant that it is a Métis boy who shows Thom the way for he comes to see the necessity of the inclusion of the Métis in the concept of brotherhood and community. The boy points to Jesus and Thom must return to the teachings of Christ and not the interpretations that Block has instituted.

> Then Jackie Labret, bending down to lead the way to the manger, stood before him. There must lie the way. Not the paths of conscienceless violence of one man's misguided interpretation of tradition. They brought chaos. But the path of God's revelation. Christ's teachings stood clear in the Scriptures; . . . . And seeing Jackie again, a long-forgotten statement by Joseph rose in his memory. "We are spared war duty and possible death on the battlefield only because we are to be so much the better witnesses for Christ here at home." . . .
>
> No. If in suppression and avoidance lay defeat, then victory beckoned in pushing ahead. Only a conquest by love unites the combatants. And in the heat of this battle lay God's peace.
>
> (238)

This concept of peace through action is Wiebe's concept of peace.

As Joseph explains in his letter to Thom, it is not the peace that has come to be accepted in Wapiti.[57] According to the Wapiti definition one is at peace when one does not question or, for example, in the sense of keeping one's peace, " a state of restfulness which includes silence." (162) This kind of peace leads to destruction. Thom has witnessed the ironic results of this "slothful peace" in his community. It is not outward peace but inner peace that permits a more dynamic communion with what lies outside for it gives the

[57] Hildegard E. Tiessen, "A Mighty Inner River: 'Peace' in the Early Fiction of Rudy Wiebe," in The Canadian Novel Here and Now, ed. John Moss (Toronto: NC Press, 1978), p. 173.

strength to translate Christ's teachings in practical actions. Thom has discovered the truth he was seeking by uncovering what lies behind the appearances in his community. "Throughout Wiebe's work is a strong sense of community--a sense of man as part of a larger context, even though his protagonists often spend much of their time trying to establish their identity either within or in opposition to their community.[58] Through this process of discovery he has matured and gained a clearer vision of his own and his community's place in Canada--not isolation or avoidance but a closer contact with those in the outside world, where faith can thus be tested and strengthened through a more genuine exploration of life.

[58] Francis Mansbridge, "Wiebe's Sense of Community," Canadian Literature 77 (Summer 1978): 42.

CONCLUSION

In the novels examined in the first two chapters of this thesis the isolating consequences of the protagonist's approach to society are revealed by exploring the divergence between the author's perceptions and the protagonist's perceptions. Jacob Grossman and Ginger Coffey are blocked from true participation in society and an understanding of themselves by delusions of grandeur and erroneous self-concepts. Sandor Hunyadi's and Duddy Kravitz's attempt to belong to society leads them to define themselves and others by the rules of the urban jungle. They too isolate themselves from meaningful contact with others.

In the novels analysed in Chapter Three Noah Adler and Thom Wiens share their authors' concern with participation and integration into the wider society. Their revelation of the inconsistencies in their restrictive environments leads to a better understanding of themselves and the world. We witness here a progression in the approach of the protagonists--from complete denial of one's environment by the protagonists in Chapter One, to a failed attempt to belong by the protagonists in Chapter Two, to a final integrative vision by the protagonists in Chapter Three.

The protagonists in the novels discussed in Chapter Three articulate best what Eli Mandel refers to as "double-

ness" and identifies as the ethnic "voice" in Canadian writing. Noah and Thom come to identify with this doubleness through their exploration of the two worlds they inhabit. William H. New clarifies this position when he talks of Paul Tallard in Two Solitudes.

> His own identity involves his consciousness of both together, and this 'new' identity, if he is not to fail as his father did, he must defend, for it is the only way he can fulfil himself and let his past bring forth a future.
>
> His problem is one of solving an alienation from two worlds. When denial of either will not do, an affirmation of the validity of both (in relationship to each other, that is) becomes all important.[59]

Noah, unlike the smaller hero his father was, resolves this problem by his acceptance of his cultural past and the certitude that he must find a place in the wider world. Thom also, unlike his self-effacing father, finds meaning by redefining his past and entering the world outside the confines of the garrison. This doubleness is presented in a more satisfying form in Peace Shall Destroy Many for it is articulated within the spatial and temporal dimensions of the novel. Thom Wiens concludes his search and has found, to use William H. New's phrase, his own "private world" as well as a strategy for integration. In Son of a Smaller Hero Noah gains understanding but the search continues beyond the novel's space and time and is defined in vaguer terms than in Wiebe's novel.

[59] William H. New, "In Defense of Private Worlds: An Approach to Irony in Canadian Fiction," Journal of Commonwealth Literature 10 (1970): 135

Eli Mandel provides a further insight into these novels and helps to interpret the progression noted in the novels in Chapter Three.

> If life in the ghetto is impossible because illusory, but to leave it is to be an "other" and to deny one's own existence, where then is home. How is authentic human existence possible? Noah's decision not to define himself in opposition, but by remaking himself--not by being a goy, but a man--appears heroic, although everything that follows in Richler's work suggests it may be sinister. For the dialectic of self and other may generate not humanity, but monstrousness.[60]

For Noah and Thom the remaking generates not only humanity but wholeness because it is based on an acceptance of their doubleness. The dialectic of self and other produces monstrousness in Sandor Hunyadi and in Duddy Kravitz because the remaking is a denial of the self. For Jacob Grossman and Ginger Coffey it produces grotesqueness because it is a camouflage of the self. These protagonists are alienated from society because they are alienated from themselves.

The potentially nihilistic and absurdist view that may accompany irony is not evident in this group of novels. A statement made by John Roberts in connection with Under the Ribs of Death is ~~also~~ applicable to the rest of the works analysed in this thesis. "The absurdist position is based on a total lack of faith in both man and God; there is neither order nor purpose in life. Under the Ribs of Death while denouncing false gods, leaves man more or less intact.

[60] Eli Mandel, "Ethnic Voice in Canadian Writing." In Identities: The Impact of Ethnicity on Canadian Society, ed. Wsevolod Isajiw (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1977), p. 60.

There is hope."[61] There is hope in the other five novels also. Irony is used to deflate pretensions, to reveal contradictions and to effect reversals. At the same time it points to the possibility that the immigrant and ethnic protagonist can embrace life and become part of the world.

In the novels this is translated by the redemptive and integrative vision that is presented or suggested as a countervision to the isolation of the immigrant and ethnic protagonist. In The Rich Man and in The Luck of Ginger Coffey redemption is possible through the protagonist's final attainment of self-awareness and the realization that he is part of humanity. In Under the Ribs of Death it lies in the example of the life-affirming characters in the novel ie., Sandor's father and Sandor's uncle Janos. In The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz it is hinted at through the unmasking process that reveals Duddy's ironic progress. An integrative vision is presented in Son of a Smaller Hero where it is shown that it is possible to internalize the positive aspects of the ghetto while wanting to be part of the wider society. In Peace Shall Destroy Many an integrative vision is manifested in the protagonist's realization that the concept of brotherhood is diminished if it is only applied to a restricted Mennonite community. The true meaning of the term must be understood through action and by applying it to a much wider context--inclusion and not exclusion.

[61]John Roberts, "Irony in an Immigrant Novel," p. 48.

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