

minority acculturation positions are themselves.¹¹ Taken together, we can perhaps begin to study and understand the way in which acculturation affects Canadian ethnic minority writers, readers, and literature in general.

Carleton University

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- 11 The corollary of this point is that the nature of majority ethnicity and status must also be studied and then be taken into consideration in the discussion of minority writing. I have touched on this aspect only briefly here (for example, in the list of items that make up the dominant collectivities in the Table), but I have discussed it more fully elsewhere: Padolsky 148 ff.; also "Cultural Diversity and Canadian Literature: A Pluralistic Approach to Majority and Minority Writing in Canada," unpublished paper delivered to the Ninth Biennial Canadian Ethnic Studies Association Conference, Halifax, N.S., October 14-17, 1987. Much more work remains to be done in this area.

The Fictionalization of the Vertical Mosaic: The Immigrant, Success and National Mythology

In the years since the publication in 1965 of John Porter's *The Vertical Mosaic*, the relationship between ethnicity and socio-economic stratification in Canada has become a commonplace for students and researchers in Canadian ethnic studies. Considerably less attention, however, has been paid to the relationship between the vertical mosaic and cultural expression. In an article first published in 1963, "The Dodo and the Cruising Auk: Class in Canadian Literature," Robert McDougall argued that Canadian writers in general reflect Canada's elitist class structure, both in their own genteel backgrounds and in their failure to come to grips with the issue of class in Canada. According to McDougall, "Our literature shows what can only be described as an abnormal absence of feeling for class and of concern for what the class structure can do in a developing society to make or mar the life of the individual... class is not a central issue in any significant part of our fiction."¹ Much has changed in Canada since Professor McDougall wrote these words, not the least of which has been the coming of age of multiculturalism and of ethnic literature in Canada — developments which have had and are continuing to have a significant impact on our cultural imagination.²

- 1 McDougall, Robert L., "The Dodo and the Cruising Auk: Class in Canadian Literature," *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, Eli Mandel, ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P 1971) 217.
- 2 For a sense of the changing relationship between 'ethnic' and 'mainstream' Canadian literature, see *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Special Issue, *Ethnicity and Canadian Literature* XIV.1 (1982); E.D. Blodgett, *Configuration: Essays in the Canadian Literatures* (Downsview: ECW 1982); Jars Balan, ed. *Identifications: Ethnicity and the Writer in Canada* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies 1982); Walter E. Riedel, ed. *The Old World and the New: Literary Perspectives of German-Speaking Canadians* (Toronto: U of Toronto P 1984); Tamara J. Palmer and Beverly J. Rasporich, "Ethnic Literature," *The New Canadian Encyclopedia* Vol. I (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers 1985) 595-598; Joseph Pivato, ed. *Contrasts: Comparative Essays on Italian-Canadian Writing* (Montréal: Guernica 1985); *Canadian Literature*, Special Issue,

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If the relationship between ethnicity and class is as entrenched as Porter suggested,³ it would seem logical that the tensions and frustrations inherent in ethnic experience in Canada would be expressed by writers who portray this experience; and that furthermore, these writers would bring to Canadian literature the very sensibility McDougall found glaringly absent in 1963 — one profoundly aware of the power of a class structure, composed of a complex amalgam of economic status and ethnicity, to 'make and mar' the lives of individuals. However, one wonders just how this awareness has been expressed in literature, particularly if one is interested in delineating the Canadian sensibility within a North American context.⁴

Italian-Canadian Connections 106 (Fall 1985); Cyril Dabydeen, *A Shapely Fire: Changing the Literary Landscape* (Oakville: Mosaic Press 1987); J. M. Bumstead, ed. "APART: Papers from the 1984 Ottawa Conference on Language, Culture and Literary Identity in Canada," *Canadian Literature Supplement* 1 (May 1987); Enoch Padolsky, "The Place of Italian-Canadian Writing," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21.4 (Winter 1986-87): 138-152.

3 See, for example, Wallace Clement, *Class, Power and Property: Essays on Canadian Society* (Toronto: Methuen Publications 1983). For a thought-provoking critique of current measurements of social mobility see Franc Sturino, "The Social Mobility of Italian Canadians: 'Outside' and 'Inside' Concepts of Mobility," in *Polyphony: Italians in Ontario*, The Bulletin of the Multicultural History Society of Ontario 7.2 (Fall/Winter 1985): 123-127. Social scientists have also been interested in exploring the possible connection between ethnicity and achievement motivation. See for example Bernard Rosen, "Race, Ethnicity and the Achievement Syndrome," *American Sociological Review* 24 (February 1959): 47-60.

4 Not surprisingly, given both Canada's history and its geography, there is an important and growing body of scholarship aimed at defining Canadian identity, particularly in relation to American, from a variety of perspectives. In literary criticism, one thinks of such classic pieces as E.K. Brown's *On Canadian Poetry* (Toronto: Ryerson Press 1943); some of the essays of Malcolm Ross, collected recently in *The Impossible Sum of Our Traditions: Reflections on Canadian Literature* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1986), the work of Northrop Frye, perhaps particularly his "Conclusion" to Carl F. Klink, ed. *A Literary History of Canada* (Toronto: U of Toronto P 1967); and Margaret Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi 1972). More recently, this attempt to define the quintessence of Canadian identity, as opposed to American, has been continued by Gail McGregor in *The Wacousta Syndrome: Explorations in the Canadian Landscape* (Toronto: U of Toronto P 1985); see also, in a more sociological vein, S.M. Lipset's classic comparative work, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (New York: Basic Books 1963). Also S. M. Lipset, "Canada and the United States: The Cultural Dimension," *Canada and the United States: Enduring Friendship, Persistent Stress*, eds. Charles F. Doran and John H. Sigler (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall 1985) and "Revolution and Counterrevolution: The United States and Canada," *The Revolutionary Theme in Contemporary America*, ed. Thomas Ford (Lexington: UP of Kentucky 1965) 21-64. Also Ramsay Cook, "Chapter Ten: Imagining a North American Garden: Some Parallels and Differences in Canadian and American Culture," *Canada, Quebec and the Uses of Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1986) 161-176. See also the recent interdisciplinary collection,

Students of American society are well aware of the significance to the American cultural identity of the intertwined mythologies of the promised land and the dream of success and of how these mythologies, along with certain other elements in the American experience, have worked to promote American faith in upward mobility and in the melting pot.⁵ They are also well aware of the role that literature, both *belles lettres* and popular, has played in creating and perpetuating, critiquing and modifying this mythology.⁶ Much less has been written about if and how the inevitable clash between Canada's own particular vision of itself as a land of opportunity (albeit perhaps a more modest vision than that cherished by Americans), and the harsh realities of the vertical mosaic reverberated through the Canadian cultural imagination, helping to shape a sense of identity and of the possible, both for the nation as a whole and for the individuals within it.

The points of departure for this study, then, are three interrelated questions and my perception that these questions, and particularly their interrelationship, have not been widely or fully addressed in Canada. First, has the real-life vertical mosaic had an impact on the ethnic voice in Canadian literature? This essentially historical and sociological question raises the second question, a profoundly literary one, part of it framed recently by Robert Kroetsch when he asked, "...is there, at the point where literature and ethnicity meet, a characteristic narrative structure...?"⁷ and more generally by Eli Mandel in an earlier exploration of the ethnic voice in Canadian literature.⁸ My version of this question is the broad one:

D.H. Flaherty and W.R. McKercher, eds. *Southern Exposure: Canadian Perspectives on the United States* (Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson 1986).

5 See, for example, Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard UP 1950); Vernon L. Parrington, *The Colonial Mind, 1620-1800* (New York: Harcourt Brace 1927); Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880's* (New Haven: Yale UP 1950); Kenneth Lynn, *The Dream of Success: A Study of the Modern American Imagination* (Westport: Greenwood Press 1955); Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap 1951). For more recent related scholarship see John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana UP 1985); and Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity, Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford UP 1986).

6 See, for example, David M. Fine, *The City, the Immigrant and American Fiction, 1880-1920* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press 1977); Philip Butcher, *The Ethnic Image in Modern American Literature* I and II (Washington: Howard UP 1984).

7 Robert Kroetsch, "The Grammar of Silence: Narrative Patterns in Ethnic Writing," *Canadian Literature* 106 (Fall 1985): 65.

8 Eli Mandel, "Ethnic Voice in Canadian Writing," in Wsewold Isajiw, ed. *Identities: The Impact of Ethnicity on Canadian Society* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates 1977).

through the narrative structures, and thematic preoccupations of their work, have writers who depict ethnic experience in Canada created a recognizable Fiction of Ethnicity — a set of structural, thematic and stylistic conventions that constitute a tradition or genre, a cultural artifact — that reflects in some way the reality of ethnic experience in Canada and at the same time predisposes us to perceive that experience in terms of these conventions.⁹ Assuming that they have created such a Fiction, my third question concerns the connection between this fiction and the place of ethnicity in Canada's cultural imagination. Has this Fiction of Ethnicity become an element of the Canadian cultural ethos that in some way mediates the tensions between high expectations and limited opportunities that would seem to be a feature of ethnic experience in the vertical mosaic? I do not intend to make a foolhardy attempt to answer each of these admittedly broad and intangible questions in turn, thoroughly and methodically. Rather, I will explore the second, literary question, focusing on the point where it intersects with the other two — the sociological and the broadly cultural — because I strongly suspect that this is a point of illumination for both the social scientist and the literary critic, as well as for the cultural historian.

Where is this point of illumination? Agreeing with Mandel that the ethnic voice is essentially schizophrenic (a condition that is 'a form of psychic anarchy' brought on, he uses R.D. Laing to explain, by an "involuntary attempt of the self to free itself from a repressive social reality") (58), and with Kroetsch's closely related point that the narrative of ethnicity grows out of a number of binary patterns, I find it in one of these binary patterns that Kroetsch identifies — the "extreme tension between ideas of success and ideas of failure" (66). What I will call the success motif is the point of intersection between literature and the sociological construct of the vertical mosaic and is very near to the structural and thematic centre of the Fiction of Ethnicity. The success motif is also the point at which the Fiction of Ethnicity intersects with cultural mythology, both mirroring and evoking some of the deepest anxieties within the Canadian psyche.

Though broadly based on a wide reading of literature in Canada that deals with immigrant and ethnic experience, my discussion will draw primarily on an analysis of seven novels: Henry Kreisel's *The Rich Man*;

John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death*; Frank Paci's *The Italians and The Father*; Mordecai Richler's *Son of a Smaller Hero* and *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*; and Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*. All of these novels deal with the dilemma that upward mobility poses for immigrant or ethnic characters and consequently can be seen as "literature existing at an interface of two cultures, a form concerned with defining itself, its voice, the dialectic of self and other and the duplicities of self creation, transformation and identities" (Mandel, 65).¹⁰

The situation implied here of being caught between two worlds, and the process of either coping or extricating oneself is a difficult and painful one, whether viewed from a psychological, sociological, or literary perspective. All three perspectives meet, however, at the center of the pain, which is a crisis of identity for the dislocated immigrant (and his children), no longer who he once was, though not yet the authentic New World self that he wants to create out of his North American experiences. This crisis of identity, both personal and communal is also a crisis of language, engendered by a complex gap between perception and expression.

It has been suggested that the way out of this painful impasse (whether it is viewed as a psychological, sociological, or literary problem) is an act of imagination — fictionalizing, mythmaking (see Mandel, 61). Or as Robert Kroetsch puts it, "In ethnic writing there is often an attempt at healing by the rewriting of myths." He then suggests that the myth most commonly retold is "the garden story" (69). That this would be so is not surprising when one considers how deeply entrenched the image of the New World as a promised land, a paradise, a panacea, is in the imagination of western civilization.¹¹ From the age of exploration and even before, the New World has been a repository for Europe's dreams, both spiritual and material, and a significant element in the New World's magnetism for the immigrant has

¹⁰ While these novels seem to me both representative and skillfully written examples of literature about immigrant and ethnic experience in which the success motif is central, they are by no means the only examples. One can also see this preoccupation in the work of Austin Clarke, Bharti Mukherjee, Cyril Dabydeen, Rohinton Mistry, Guy Vanderhaeghe, and others. However, my choice of these seven novels is based to some degree on their being among the first wave of literature by second-generation writers, and they might, therefore, be seen as representing a formative phase in the development of Canada's "Fiction of Ethnicity."

¹¹ This idea has been discussed by a number of cultural historians. It is particularly emphasized in Howard Mumford Jones, *O Strange New World, American Culture: The Formative Years* (New York: Viking Press 1965).

9 For a particularly lucid discussion of this process, see Annette Kolodney, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P 1984) 10. See also Northrop Frye, "Motive for Metaphor," *The Educated Imagination* (Toronto: CBC Merchandising 1963).

been the potent mythology of North America as the New Eden.¹² Inextricably tied up with this mythology, particularly as it relates to the immigrant experience (which is, after all, as Margaret Atwood and many others have pointed out, perhaps the quintessential North American experience), has been the dream of success, and of course its mirror image, the nightmare of failure. If one decides to leave one's home for the Promised Land, one is inevitably going to feel obligated to find it. Whether envisioned as the place to build the perfect society, or to find personal wealth and ease, the New Eden inevitably demands that those who enter it prove their worthiness by succeeding.

Nor is it surprising that one looking for "the characteristic narrative of the ethnic experience" would find binary patterns (Kroetsch, 65). The immigrant sensibility, informed as it is by a chasm between old and new, there and here, past and present self, perception and language, and by an awareness of having, by virtue of migrating, suddenly become "other"¹³ is virtually fated to experience the world as essentially binary. The binary pattern of success/failure, then, is, not surprisingly, integral to the structural framework of ethnic fiction, a pattern that grows out of the complex psychic and social significance of immigrating to the edenic New World; and it is a binary pattern that is made up of a number of interrelated themes, themselves developed as polarities. The three most important of these themes in the context of attempting to illuminate the relationship between the vertical mosaic and the Fiction of Ethnicity are the conflict between ethnic identity and social mobility; the symbiotic interaction between victim and oppressor; and the gap between illusion and reality. Exploring these interrelated themes as they are developed in the novels mentioned above

12. Among the many treatments of this subject in American cultural history, see, for example, Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford UP 1964); Elaine and William Hedges, *Land and Imagination: The Rural Dream in America* (Rochell Park: Hayden Book Co. 1980). For an interesting discussion of utopianism in Canada, see A. W. Rasporich, "Utopian Ideals and Community Settlements in Western Canada, 1880-1914," *The Prairie West, Historical Readings*, R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: U of Alberta P 1985) 335-351; also see Dennis Duffy, "Heart of Flesh: Exile and the Kingdom in English Canadian Literature," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 18.2 (Summer 1983): 58-69.

13. For an interesting discussion of the dynamics of becoming "other" see Roxanna Ng, "Constituting Ethnic Phenomenon: An Account From the Perspective of Immigrant Women," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XIII.1 (1981): 97-108. Also Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, particularly Chapter 1.

will, I hope, partly delineate the nature and significance of the success motif in the Canadian Fiction of Ethnicity and thereby, to some small degree, in the Canadian imagination.

PART 1: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ETHNIC IDENTITY AND UPWARD MOBILITY

George Woodcock has suggested that it would be only a mild metaphorical exaggeration to call Canada "a land of invisible ghettos" (Mandel, in Isajiw, 59). The fictional landscape that emerges from a reading of Canadian ethnic literature is indeed such a land, a complex, often psychically dangerous maze of interlocking microcosms whose real, but invisible boundaries separate their inhabitants from one another by means of a complex set of conventions that are based on a subtle blend of ethnicity, wealth and class. In the opening pages of *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Mordecai Richler establishes the central conflict between the aspirations of the protagonist, Noah Adler, and his ethnicity. He does this through a vivid, poetic description of the dimensions and contours of the Jewish ghetto in Montreal, a ghetto that "has no real walls and no true dimensions. The walls are the habit of atavism and the dimensions are an illusion. But it is a ghetto that exists all the same."¹⁴

Through his description of the ghetto's geography, Richler makes it clear that the ghetto generates an enormous energy directed toward 'moving up.' The milieu of St. Lawrence Street, "the aorta of the ghetto" where most of the working class Jews "do their buying and their praying and their agitating and most of their sinning" (14) is florid, vibrant, but unsavoury:

Every night St. Lawrence Boulevard is lit up like a neon cake and used up men stumble out of a hundred different flophouses to mix with rabbinical students and pimps and Trotskyites and poolroom sharks. Hair tonic and water is consumed in back alleys. Swank whores sally at you out of the promised jubilee of the penny archades. Crap games flourish under lamp posts. You can take Rita the Polack up to the Liberty Rooms or you can listen to Panofsky speak on Tim Buck and The Worker... (15)

Conditions improve on the five streets between St. Lawrence Boulevard and Park Avenue. Here is the slightly more respectable business centre

14. Mordecai Richler, *Son of a Smaller Hero* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1969, originally published by Andre Deutsch 1955) 14. All further references to this work appear in the text.

where "the aspiring" who "own haberdashery stores, junk yards, and basement zipper factories" sell the goods "cut or pressed by their relations below St. Lawrence Boulevard" (15). Still further on "above Park Avenue" in Outremont "a mild" neighborhood, live "the employer and professional Jews" who "own their own duplexes belong to the Freemasons, or, failing that, the Knights of Pythias and send their sons to McGill." But they too return to St. Lawrence Avenue to shop "where the Jews speak quaintly like the heroes of nightclub jokes" (15).

This reference to the quaint language of the immigrants who become heroes of 'jokes' is an interesting one, because in its juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory attributes, the heroic and the comic, it embodies the ambivalence of the upwardly mobile toward their ethnicity, an ambivalence that may be very near to the mainspring of ethnic humour;¹⁵ it is an ambivalence that is profoundly centred in language, and urban geography, and one that is a recurring theme in ethnic fiction. Drawn to their Montreal roots (perhaps partly because it is difficult to move beyond the outer margins of the 'invisible ghetto'), to the heart of the ghetto where the inhabitants, largely immigrants, cannot even partially hide their Jewish identity, but must proclaim it with every word they speak, the upwardly mobile Jews come face to face with their former selves. That encounter is painful, stressful, because it plays on their profound anxiety about whether that self is loveable and admirable, or laughable, a joke. This ambivalence is also depicted in *Under the Ribs of Death*, perhaps most vividly in a scene where Sandor Hunyadi, the young protagonist, deeply ashamed of his Hungarian roots, goes with his family to meet a group of newly arrived immigrants:

Sandor turned pale at the sight of them. They stood there, awkward and begrimed, the men in tight-fitting, wrinkled clothes, with their wrists and ankles sticking out, unshaven and foreign looking, the women in kerchiefs and voluminous skirts and men's shoes... exactly the way his grandmother looked in that picture in the front room. The kinship was odious. He knew how hard it was for his parents to change their ways. But they were changing. They used tinned goods sometimes at home now and store bought bread when they had enough money. English food was appearing on their table, the English language in their home. Slowly, very slowly they were changing. They were

becoming Canadians. And now here it stood. Here was the nightmare survival of themselves mocking and dragging them back to their shameful past.¹⁶

Though the boundaries and subtle graduations within the ghetto are somewhat less clearly delineated in *Under the Ribs of Death* than in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, and its inhabitants a mixture of 'foreigners' rather than a concentration of a particular group, the ghetto is nevertheless a very real entity in Marlyn's novel, one that engenders in the young Sandor a fierce determination to escape. "Some day he would grow up and leave all of this," he vows to himself as he surveys the squalor of Henry Street... leave it behind him forever and never look back, never remember again this dirty foreign neighborhood and the English gang who chased him home from school" (17). He continually urges his father to change their Hungarian name to an English one. "We'd be like other people, like everybody else. But we gotta change it soon before too many people find out" (24). Later he confides in his Uncle Janos, who is more sympathetic to the materialistic ethos of North America than Sandor's father, "some day I'm going to make a lot of money" (85).

The other most notably on-the-make character in ethnic fiction and one who therefore invites comparison to Sandor, Duddy Kravitz, is less obsessed with obliterating his ethnicity than with being able to move with it beyond the boundaries it seems to set for him. Indeed, Duddy exploits his ethnicity in his drive for wealth. This he does, quite literally, through his Bar Mitzvah films, which, in the hands of his pretentiously artsy, and boozily unreliable WASP filmmaker become self-consciously anthropological studies of tribal rites that objectify that ethnicity and at once, paradoxically, both universalize and trivialize it. That Duddy is able to use his ethnicity in this way is not because he is any more unprincipled than Sandor. (For example, Sandor brazenly charges his friends a fee to look through a toy kaleidoscope his uncle gives him. And later, as a young adult, he shows himself willing to sell his uncle to the devil, for money, when he urges Janos to marry the wealthy Fraulein Kleinholtz, a grotesque character, strongly suggestive of the folktale's evil witch.) Rather it is because Duddy's ethnicity, nourished by a more extensive community with a stronger identity than the one that has shaped Sandor, has enabled him to develop greater personal *flamboyance*

15 See Robert B. Klymasz, "The Ethnic Joke in Canada Today," *Explorations in Canadian Folklore*, eds. Edith Fowke & Carole H. Carpenter (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1985) 320-328.

16 John Marlyn, *Under the Ribs of Death* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1986, originally published 1957) 77. All further references to this work appear in the text.

and confidence than the rather sullen Sandor, and an imaginative, if perverse, caste of mind, open to all possibilities in the struggle to succeed.

A sense of the ghetto as a geographic entity that engenders in many of its inhabitants a strong desire to escape is also present in Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*. This is generally projected through the secondary characters of Chaim Knopp, the shoichet, and his son Ralph, rather than through the main character, Abraham, and his son Isaac, largely, perhaps, because the struggles of the latter (insofar as one can make such a distinction) are more spiritual than material. Chaim, like Abraham and his family, still lives in 'the flats,' the older immigrant centre of the Jewish ghetto, whose heart is the old white synagogue, which is close enough to Chaim's home for him to walk to it on holy days. His son Ralph, on the other hand, has succeeded in moving to 'the heights' because he owns a factory.

In the context of Ralph's ascent to 'the heights' it is noteworthy that the image of urban geography presented in this novel and several others is a vertical one, disturbingly reminiscent of the structure of Dante's *inferno*. The ghetto's centre is at the bottom of something, perhaps a pit, and each remove *up* from that bottom level is a successive move away from 'pure' ethnicity toward assimilation *and* success, envisioned (albeit ultimately ironically) as existing somewhere at the top, in wealthy 'English' or blandly 'non-ethnic' neighborhoods. Indeed, as seen through the eyes of Sandor Hunyadi, who gains entry there briefly (appropriately enough) to mow the green lawns of the wealthy, this land at the top is a paradise "... that lay smiling under a friendly spell, where the sun always shone, and the clean-washed tint of child and sky and garden would never fade" (64.)

In addition to being symbolized in urban geography, tension between ethnicity and upward mobility, not surprisingly, is very often presented in ethnic fiction as part of a generation gap. Upwardly mobile second and third generation sons and daughters not only feel isolated from their immigrant parents and grandparents because of the sometimes sharp differences between their customs and Canadian ones, and because of language barriers that make it difficult for them to communicate with each other, as in Frank Paci's *The Italians* and *The Black Madonna* in which the second-generation characters, Bill, Lorianna and Marie, literally cannot talk with their parents about complex subjects; often, second-generation characters are also so deeply ashamed of their parents that they refuse to acknowledge them because their parents' blatant ethnicity poses such a threat to their fragile 'Canadian' identities. Wiseman portrays this in *The Sacrifice* through Ralph

Knopp who, when he is with a 'goy' friend and unexpectedly passes his father, the latter dressed as a shoichet, pretends not to know him.

This need of the child to reject his ethnicity, as embodied in his parents, particularly the father, is often presented in ethnic fiction as an act of unnamings and renaming: the psychic dislocation that the younger feels is intimately related to the conflict between mobility and ethnicity. Maria Barone becomes Marie; Stefano Mancuso becomes Stephen; Duddy Kravitz becomes Dudley Kane; Sandor Hunyadi becomes Alex Hunter, who fantasizes that his real father is not Joseph Hunyadi, but an English lord (19).

Of course not all of the inter-generational tensions in ethnic fiction are mediated through quasi-patricidal fantasies. Another common pattern is that of having stylized characters, sometimes dangerously close to being caricatures, represent each generation and preside over the successive sections of the ghetto as spokesmen for the particular blend of spiritual and material values that permeates each stratum. The conflicts among these characters embody the conflicts inherent in the process of assimilating and the closely related one of succeeding. For example, such are the complex tensions between Melech Adler, immigrant patriarch, founder of the family scrapyard business, and his sons and grandson, Noah, the protagonist in *Son of a Smaller Hero*. And those in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* between Duddy's grandfather, Simcha Kravitz, proud patriarch, repository of the family's spiritual heritage, and Benji, his wealthy businessman son, ostensibly impotent, unable to produce an heir despite (or perhaps because of) having reached the heights of the upper level, where he lives in a mansion modeled after the country estate of an English gentleman; and with third-generation Duddy himself who, as a son of the 'failed' brother, Max, combination cab driver and pimp, is obsessed with the North American dream of material success; consequently he is incapable of fully grasping the spiritual nature of the Edenic vision underlying his grandfather's admonition that "a man without land is nobody."

This interaction between generational conflict, urban geography and the tension between ethnicity and upward mobility is also at the structural and thematic centre of Paci's three novels.¹⁷ In *The Father*, the interplay of these elements is developed through a series of interlocking and conflicting

17 Frank Paci, *The Italians* (Ottawa: Oberon Press 1978); *The Black Madonna* (Ottawa: Oberon Press 1984); *The Father* (Ottawa: Oberon Press 1984). All further references to these works appear in the text.

binaries. The Mancuso family, a kind of collective character in the novel, and a central one, is presented through a series of dyadic conflicts between husband and wife, father and son, brother and brother. These conflicts grow out of the more fundamental dualities between heart and mind, spirit and matter, communalism and individualism, that are basic to the gap between the old world and the new and between the West End Italian neighborhood where the Mancusos have their first bakery, and the more prosperous district to which they eventually move.

The relationship between Maddelena Mancuso, an educated, sophisticated urbanite from central Italy, and her husband, Oreste, a simple, warm-hearted baker from the agrarian Abruzzi in southern Italy, is torn apart by the tensions generated by these fundamental dualities. Oreste, the man of the heart, the communal man, enjoys the idyllic life of baking bread for his friends and neighbors in the west end 'ghetto' — the new-world re-creation of the old world village. In contrast, Maddelena wants to 'get ahead.' She adapts well to Canada, learning, through reading, to speak an English that Stephen recognizes as being 'better' than that used by his teachers. She also takes business courses that eventually enable her to transform the old bakery, with its stone oven just like the one that Oreste had used in his Abruzzi village, into an efficient city-wide operation that replaces Oreste's skillful, caring hands with machines, the stone oven with large 'automated' ones of chrome and steel.

The Mancusos' two sons, the studious Stephen, the main character from whose point of view the story is presented, and the rebellious Michael, inherit and further symbolize the duality embodied in their parents' relationship. Michael, though resembling Maddelena physically, is, with his emotional nature, Oreste's spiritual son. In contrast, Stephen, though resembling Oreste, is, with his detached, rational nature, Maddelena's spiritual offspring. This conflict-producing and potentially crippling inheritance turns both sons into fractured, tortured beings, particularly Stephen, whose spiritual deformity is symbolized in his withered hand. Indeed, the entire novel could be read as a chronicle of Stephen's spiritual journey toward wholeness or salvation. He falls from innocence early in the novel in a thinly veiled garden-of-Eden scene in which he is injured, marked for life, while stealing fruit from a neighbor's apple tree. Both his symbolic deformity and his struggle to find himself and some kind of inner peace are intimately tied up with second-generation immigrant experience; and this experience, entailing as it does a wrenching break with the past, and an intense need to reconcile the disparate elements in one's being in order to discover or create one's identity within the sterile, potentially destructive

North American materialistic/rationalistic ethos, is an apt prototype for the universal Odyssey of the human spirit expressed in the myth of the garden.

Particularly interesting is the relationship in *The Father* between, on the one hand, the dualities inherent in the garden myth — particularly good/evil, paradise/exile, body/spirit and, on the other hand, the ethnic ghetto and upward mobility. Albeit with some ambivalence, the ethnic ghetto symbolizes the positive side of this duality, the territory beyond it, the negative. Oreste's feeling for his work and his West End 'village' is a deeply religious one. His baking of bread and making of wine are religious rites which he conducts garbed in his baker's 'whites' — a miracle similar somehow though reversed, to the miracle of transubstantiation presided over by the robed priest. Both 'miracles' transcend time, uniting past and present, body and spirit. Like the priest who initiates the young Stefano, as altar boy, into the mysteries behind the altar, Oreste takes the young Stephen into the bakery to witness the mystery of bread making.

Oreste explained a few details about the nature of the dough and how it had been left to rise during the night... Stefano smiled and stood to the side. Oreste took out a white paper cap from his back pocket and put it on. Stefano saw his father turn his face away for a moment, as if he had something in his eye. Then he made the sign of the cross ... The oven is the most important part of the bakery, Stefano. This is an old oven made of bricks, see. The stone inside is important for the taste. We make our bread just like the Romans did thousands of years ago... People were making bread before they could write.

Later, Oreste shows Stefano who "listened in awe," (37) how he makes his special bread — bread so much a reflection of himself that it has his name: "Orestepan."

See how its done, Stefano... You have to touch it a certain way. With the heel of your palms. Then the fingers. Add a little flour. Don't let it get too pasty. But just right. There, see. There's nothing better in the world to eat than bread. We keep the first loaf to remind us of the care we put into it. (40, 41)

Oreste also explains to Stefano that part of the secret of his bread is his own happiness ("Bread can't grow... under the hands of a sad man"), and knowing the people he bakes for: "I couldn't make bread just for strangers. You gotta care about what you do, Stefano. You can't care for the bread if you bake for... strangers" (60).

Thus, as the village baker of the West End, Oreste lives an almost idyllic existence in which the miracle of breadmaking unites him with his surround-

ings. Like the pre-war Abruzzi village that he was forced to leave by the war, the West End *Gemeinschaft* neighborhood is, for Oreste, a kind of Eden. But he senses the possible intrusion of disruptive forces when he curses Canadian bread, so unlike his own. "Crust is the soul of bread, *figlio mio*" he tells Stefano. "Never forget. In this country they don't believe in crust... they don't know bread at all in this country" (40).

Oreste's sense of the significance of this difference between his bread and the soulless "soft mushy rolls" produced in the new world foreshadows both his gradual exile and destruction and that of the West End — a destruction brought about by his wife's 'success' and by 'the devastation of urban renewal.' Nor does Paci provide any hopeful hint of paradise in the efficient machines and the "apartment houses and parking lots" that replace the baker and his village (134). Indeed, it is only when Stefano/Stephen, despite his Ph.D. in philosophy and his crippling cerebral approach to life, at last returns symbolically to his father, and all that he represents, that the reader glimpses a positive resolution to the fundamental conflicts that have fragmented the Mancuso family and Stephen's soul. This occurs in the novel's final scene in which Stephen goes to the modern Mancuso bakery to bake bread as his father once taught him to do:

He held the dough in place with his deformed hand. With the heel of the palm of his other hand he flattened the tough dough outward, then folded it, and kneaded it again ... In the silence of the huge automated bakery he began to whistle... The next day he was scheduled to fly back to Toronto and resume his teaching duties, but today he was a baker carrying on his father's work... Then he rolled six long sticks of dough. On top of the loaves he formed the initials of his father, his mother and his brother... That was his family. (193)

This mystical, transcendent rite of bread making provides him a moment in which he is able to reconcile family conflict, particularly with his father, and thus the warring dualities in his nature — dualities that reflect the larger conflict between his ethnicity and 'success' in the new world.

But even this convincing, personal resolution of the conflict between ethnic identity and social mobility is momentary, fleeting, and does not fully remove the intangible psychological and social barriers to the full acceptance and 'complete success' that often continue to elude the ethnic character, even when he is able, as Stefano/Stephen is, to move beyond the ghetto that

gave meaning to and yet limited his father's life in the new world.¹⁸ Richler's farcical humour and sometimes biting social criticism depend in large measure on the difficulty his characters have in crossing intangible but real social borders — barriers of class and ethnicity that reinforce the physical boundaries of the complex succession of territories constituting his fictional Montreal. The incongruity between his scrappy Jewish protagonists, particularly Duddy Kravitz and Joshua Shapiro, and the superficially genteel WASP world that they blunder through, in picaresque fashion, without having mastered its social conventions, is at the thematic and structural centre of *The Apprenticeship* and *Joshua Then and Now*. Like Saul Bellows' *The Adventures of Augie March*, these novels grow out of a binary sensibility, one that views the physical and social space beyond the loved and hated ghetto as a foreign land where if one enters, one is not only, of necessity, an adventurer, but also, almost inevitably, a heathen.¹⁹ While the insipid Wasp elite, embodied in characters like the bloodless Professor, Theo Hall in *Son* and in the seamless Mr. Calder in *The Apprenticeship*²⁰, may be attracted to the exotic vitality and directness of a Noah Adler or a Duddy Kravitz, it is an attraction that fades when the latter transgress certain, largely unspoken, rules. For example, the wealthy Hugh Calder cools toward Duddy when the latter takes advantage of their friendship to make a deal with Calder for his ghetto friend, Cohen, the scrappy dealer:

'I suppose, Mr. Calder said, pushing his plate away, 'that I should have expected something like this from you. I had hoped we were friends.'
'Sure we are, Duddy had replied, blushing. But friends help each other.'
... I expect, Mr. Calder has said, that you're earning a good commission on this.'

18 The marginality of the second-generation has often been pointed out in sociological studies of ethnicity. The particular way in which this ambivalence is reflected in the work of second-generation writers in the United States is discussed by Werner Sollors, "Literature and Ethnicity," *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. Stephan Thernstrom (Cambridge: Harvard UP 1980) 647-665. The types of stances he discusses seem at least partially applicable to second-generation 'ethnic' writers in Canada.

19 That the Greek root of ethnic, *ethnikos*, was used to mean 'heathen,' a meaning that has continued to haunt the word's scholarly uses with its negative connotations, seems relevant here.

20 Mordecai Richler, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1970, originally published by Andre Deutsch 1959) 112. All further references to this work appear in the text.

Something had risen in Duddy's stomach. His eyes filled. 'I look after myself, he had said. 'Why not?'

Why not, indeed?'

... White men, Duddy thought. *Ver gerhaget*. With them you just didn't make deals. You had to diddle... He's offended, Duddy thought, but he made the deal all the same. 'Two-fifty more a ton, sure. I suppose he wanted me to play golf with him for eighteen years first or something....' (227)

Similarly, though Marlyn's tone is not, like Richler's, humorous, Sandor Hunyadi in *Under the Ribs of Death* finds that his ethnicity prevents him from crossing certain invisible boundaries. When he attempts to move beyond the North End, and get a job with an 'English' firm (Crown Investment 'est'd 1705'), Sandor finds that his interviewer is interested not in his business knowledge and experience, but in his family background:

'Hunter,' he said reflectively. 'Any relation of Colonel Hunter?' ... For the next few minutes, Alex found himself facing a leisurely barrage of questions... The questions grew more personal... At the mention of Selkirk Avenue, he thought he detected a flicker of expression in the man's eyes, too transient to be interpreted. At the next question, framed in the same courteous, almost off-hand manner as the others, he felt the colour mounting to his cheeks. He cleared his throat. 'Hungarian,' he said. (136)

Like Frank Cowperwood in Theodore Dreiser's three volume exploration of the 'dream of success' in America, Stefano Mancuso, Duddy Kravitz and Sandor Hunyadi develop early a sense that they are set apart, that theirs is to be a unique destiny. Stefano, made exceptional in childhood by his withered hand, wants first to become a priest, then later, his faith shaken, a thinker, a seeker of truth, and is isolated from his peers by his seriousness and his intense intellectuality. Duddy Kravitz, on the other hand, has an equally intense yearning for money, land and prestige. As a young boy, "Duddy wanted to be a somebody... Not a loser, certainly..." (62). Later, with grim confidence, he tells his fellow waiters at a resort hotel where he works in the summer, "If you want to bet on somebody, bet on me" (95). Sandor, too, has a dream of becoming somebody 'who mattered' — a businessman with an English name. Dreiser's Cowperwood takes as his role model the black grouper, a sinister fish who feeds off the smaller fish around him and, unfettered by ethnicity or scruples, he achieves most of his financial and romantic dreams. For the protagonists in Canada's Fiction of Ethnicity, success is never on such a grand scale, and even when they do achieve their material goals, as Duddy does, the reality of that success is more question-

able than in Dreiser's admittedly ambivalent portrayal of Cowperwood.²¹ This gap between the ethnic protagonists's yearning reach and his ultimate grasp is a function of three things: the physical and social distance between the ethnic character's world and the world where 'success' on Canadian terms is possible: in short the vertical mosaic; the concomitant absence of mentors, role models who can span the distances between the various levels of the mosaic and thereby, like Dante's Virgil, guide the success-bound traveller on his upward journey; and ultimately an underlying ironic questioning of whether such movement is really up toward paradise, or down toward the centre of the inferno.

Stefano/Stefen Mancuso, early realizing the inadequacy as mentors of his father, the ghetto/village baker and of Father Kiley, the village priest, has no role models until, as a graduate student, he happens upon the work of a linguistic philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein. He adopts not only Wittgenstein's cool rationality, but also his personal affectations. Just as Wittgenstein ultimately proves inadequate as a model for Stephen in dealing with the interrelated problems of trying to develop a balanced identity and of finding love, so too do the role models chosen by Duddy and Sandor prove inadequate guides in their quest for success. Sandor, rejecting his father's lofty humanism, wants to be like Mr. Nagy, the warped and unfeeling North End realtor/landlord whose obsession with making and hoarding money not only leaves him alone in squalid surroundings, but ultimately destroys his humanity:

... 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 white glistening teeth that reminded [Sandor] 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. (119)

Sandor/Alec himself is ultimately Nagy's victim, not only because Nagy refuses to will him his business, choosing instead to build a mausoleum to himself, but at a more profound level, because Sandor is so thoroughly deceived by Nagy, and the North American materialism he represents. Sandor has also been captivated as a youth, when he was despairing of ever being able to leave the "howling chaos" of Henry Street, by the hero of an

21 For a thorough discussion of this ambivalence and other features of Dreiser's interest in success and failure, see Alfred Kazin and Charles Shapiro, eds. *The Stature of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Survey of the Man and His Work* (Bloomington: U of Indiana P 1965).

Horatio Alger novel and, though he questions the uncompromising morality of Alger's heroic street urchin, Sandor is thrilled and renewed by what he perceives to be Alger's message:

He stood there filled with wonder that there should be such a book, giving him back his own dreams, his own secret longings that had stirred within him so long... The great ones in this book were the doers, the men of wealth and power, the men who counted... And one had only to work hard and devote oneself wholeheartedly to the things they believed to become one of them... When the time came he would get a job with Mr. Nagy. He knew now how to ask for one. (111)

Not until the end of Marilyn's novel, when the shining world of big business has collapsed into the squalor of the Great Depression, does Sandor have reason to question the reality of Ragged Jack's fictional climb, or Alger's efficacy as a mentor.²²

Duddy Kravitz also feels the need for a guide on his journey to success. "You've got to start operating... he tells himself... But where does a guy start... Where and how?" Though he later becomes obsessed with self-help books, Duddy's first inspiration is 'the Boy Wonder,' drug-dealer, gambler, racketeer and hero of a modern folktale of the ghetto perpetuated by Duddy's storytelling father, Max. Raised on a continuing saga of the Boy Wonder's remarkable feats and exploits, and with the hope of being allowed to meet him and get his advice someday, almost as a right of passage, Duddy "... likes to think... that point for point he was a lot like the Boy Wonder before he had made his name" (62). Later, Duddy is surprised to find that the Wonder's reputation as a hero does not extend beyond the borders of the ghetto, and that in the Patrician world of Hugh Calder, being connected with Jerry Dingleman, gangster, is no asset.

The lack of appropriate role models, and the related floundering and sense of malaise at the community level is also an important theme in *Son*

22 For a convincing re-evaluation of the nature and intent of Alger's fiction, see Gary Sharnhorst, *Horatio Alger, Jr.* (Boston: Twayne Publishers 1980) in which the author argues that the values promulgated by Alger, far from constituting an apology for unfettered capitalism, were based on a liberal humanitarianism that prompted him to criticize the economic assumptions of the gilded age as morally bankrupt and to urge young American manhood to uphold the ideals of honesty and community extolled in an earlier agrarian era. If this is so, as Marilyn suggests by pointing out Sandor's impatience with the over-scrupulousness of Alger's characters, Sandor, like the cultural historians who have perhaps misrepresented Alger to subsequent generations, read his mentor selectively.

of a *Smaller Hero*, where Richler notes that "the aspiring walked without certainty, pompous and ingratiating by turns" (17). When Noah declares himself to be in search of the meaning of life and his place in it by moving away from home and into an apartment outside the physical boundaries of the ghetto, he is courted by a series of would-be mentors, both inside and outside the Jewish community, but none proves adequate to the task. The Waspy professor Hall is a weakling, a phony, but so too is old Melech Adler, whose stern orthodoxy masks his own old-world sins and Noah's maternal grandfather, a respected Chassidic teacher (the more so in his mother's colored remembrances), is dead. Indeed, the central event in the novel, the death of Noah's father in a supposedly heroic attempt to rescue the Torah from fire, was nothing of the sort, and his posthumous elevation to community hero, celebrated even by the *goyim*, suggests a loss of vitality and integrity in the Jewish community that precipitates Noah's quest to become just "a human being" (203).

Thus whether their quest focuses on the largely spiritual goal of integrating the disparate elements that constitute their lives, or the material goal of achieving wealth to prove their worthiness, the protagonists in Canada's Fiction of Ethnicity have few effective guides and although those whose goals are spiritual seem ultimately closer to reaching them than do those who are bent on material success, the journey to either is tortuous, complicated by the complex physical and social barriers that make it difficult for immigrants and their children to find paradise in the New World.

PART II: VICTIMS, OPPRESSORS AND IDENTITY

The binary pattern underlying the delineation in Canada's Fiction of Ethnicity of urban geography, evident in the ambivalence toward the ghetto (squalid, shameful, but comfortable — home) and toward the affluent neighborhoods (shining, seamless, but cold, lonely and perhaps ultimately masking a spiritual sterility, if not death) that surfaces again and again in the work of Richler, Marilyn, Paci and others, is reinforced by a closely related ambivalence toward both the victim and the oppressor in the struggle to succeed. When the ethnic protagonists in the struggle ask themselves, as they inevitably do, why Henry Street is their lot and why they find it so difficult to move beyond it, they find the answer either in an outside villain or in

themselves and they often entertain both possibilities simultaneously.²³ When the aspiring twelve-year-old Sandor Hunyadi gets his first real job and a chance to move, albeit only briefly and as a menial, into the pastoral world of the 'English' suburbs, he both resents and loves the haughty sensibility he encounters there, one that puts him in his place:

Very leisurely she (his prospective employer) lowered the plump, jewelled hand which held the letter and looked out across the lawn, her gaze sweeping past him to return slowly and settle upon him, in an unexpected, careless way, Sandor thought, an insulting way, subjecting him to a long scrutiny from head to toe and back again several times, but without the flicker of an eyelid or the faintest expression of interest — much as he himself, he felt, might look if he should happen to glance absent-mindedly at a fence post. And yet in spite of this he could not help feeling that there was something in her manner which was appropriate and fitting, something which caused his resentment to fade and filled him again with pride; he was going to work for her, and so in a sense he belonged to her house and some of this splendid high arrogance of hers would be his too. This is the way it should be... This was how the English should act... dignified and cool eyed and distant. (65)

That Sandor has internalized the 'English' attitude toward him as a 'foreigner,' a 'Bohunk,' despite his resentment of it, and that it has become part of his psychological make up as an adult is obvious at crucial points in his struggle to succeed. After experiencing the polite cruelty of discriminatory hiring practices that make it ever clearer to him that his territory must remain the North End, where he seems fated to "mark time, working for one small hole-in-the-wall outfit after another, crawling around through slums, spending himself in dreary quarrels over leaking roofs and plugged drains and rent..." (183), Sandor blames himself: "He felt it again and was surprised that it should be the same, the same uncoiling disgust, the revulsion he could not bring himself to direct outward, but must turn it upon himself" (137).

This vision of himself as one who deserves to be a victim extends even to his distrusting the judgement and worth of the few English Canadians he meets who do *not* discriminate against him. When he is unable to find evidence of prejudiced attitudes in Lawson, a younger-generation business-

man who extols Canadian rather than 'British' solidarity, Sandor comes "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).

This preoccupation with victimization so important in Marlyn's insightful portrayal of the second-generation ethnic character is also a dominant theme in Frank Paci's novels, indeed, in Italian-Canadian writing generally.²⁴ Paci's fictional landscape is dotted with maimed and crippled characters whose injuries, like Stefano Mancuso's crippled hand, highlight the motif of immigrant as victim and symbolize the price of entry exacted by the New World: Oreste Mancuso, victim of the second World War, alcoholism and the demise of the West End neighborhood, is killed in a car accident; Alberto Gateano, stoic, largely unappreciated patriarch in *The Italians* loses his right arm in a bizarre accident at the steel plant where he has worked faithfully since coming to Canada as a young man; displaced peasant mother, Assunta Barone in *The Black Madonna*, is killed, horrendously dismembered when she is hit by a train. Paci's depiction of these victims — usually members of the immigrant generation, often voiceless in the Canadian milieu, misunderstood by their Canadian-born children — focuses not so much on the underlying causes of their victimization, nor on the subtle psychological or inter-ethnic dynamics of it, but on their children's coming to grips with it as one of the inescapable elements in their own lives. Richler's exploration of the dynamics of the victim/oppressor relationship, however, encompasses, perhaps even emphasizes, its role in interethnic relations.

Just as Marlyn lays bare Sandor's need for his oppressors, 'the English,' as scapegoats for his own weaknesses, but more profoundly as a kind of perverse conduit to the wealth and prestige that he can only experience vicariously by being associated, even as a lackey, with them, Richler dissects, even burlesques, the Jewish need for the *Goyim*, not only for their value as scapegoats, but also for the indispensable role they play in helping to create and maintain Jewish identity. The boundaries that demarcate the various ethnic and class-based territories in Richler's fictional landscape are

23 Eli Mandel (cited above) discusses this ambivalence perceptively using Sartre's figure of the whirligig to describe it as "... an opposition in which the opposing forces endlessly turn into one another and in which an endless oscillation between them appears to be the only mode of existence for the individual so trapped" (59).

24 See Alexandre L. Amprimoz and Sante A. Viselli, "Death Between Two Cultures: Italian-Canadian Poetry," and Roberta Sciff-Zamaro, "Black Madonna: A Search for the Great Mother," *Contrasts*, ed. Joseph Pivato, 77-119. See also J. Pivato's "Italian Canadian Women Writers Recall History," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XVIII.1 (1986): 79-88.

revealed, not only as barriers to mobility, but as essential ingredients in the complex symbiosis between inter and intra-group relations. "There is the kind of Jew," Noah, in *Son of a Smaller Hero* tells his *shiksa* mistress, Miriam, "who gets the same nourishment out of a *Goy* as the worst type of communist gets from a lynching in the south. Take the *Goy* away from him and you're pulling out the thread that holds him together" (168). Richler's characters illustrate this point by drawing nourishment from the *Goy* oppressor in a variety of ways.

While Noah and his gang of childhood friends are humiliated by the segregation they encounter at Laurentian resorts, their elevation to heroic status, if only for a night, depends on the existence of the sign, "this Beach is restricted to Gentiles," which they steal and replace with, "This Beach is Restricted to Litvaks" (54, 56). The wealthy Mr. Cohen, one of Duddy Kravitz's would-be mentors in *The Apprenticeship*, uses the *Goy* more reprehensibly to justify his sharp business practices, and the spectre of anti-Semitism to assuage Duddy's guilt over his part in his epileptic employee's accident:

'My attitude even to my oldest and dearest customer is this,' he said, making a throat-cutting gesture... A plague on all the *goyim*, that's my motto. The more money I make the better care I take of my own, the more I'm able to contribute to our hospital, the building of Israel, and other worthy causes. So a *goy* is crippled and you think you're to blame. Given the chance he would have crippled you,' he shouted, 'or thrown you into a furnace like six million others.' (226)

In *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Noah's rich uncle, Max, uses a variation of the same argument to justify blatantly distorting the facts and significance of the death of his brother, Wolf Adler, for the sake of enhancing the profile of the Jewish community, reaffirming group solidarity and improving his own political prospects: "Do you know what would happen if the so-called true story of Wolf's death got out? The anti-Semites would have a ball. It would prove to them that the Jews only care for money. That they'll even die for it" (191).

When Noah wants to tell the truth about his father's supposedly heroic death, Max accuses Noah of being "the biggest goddam anti-Semite I've ever met" (191), thereby conjuring up the presence of the *goy* within the group as a means of exerting social control.

But it is not only businessmen/politicians with questionable ethics who use the presence of the oppressor for their own purposes. Panofsky, the idealistic communist in *Son*, another contender for mentor to Noah, is a

variation on the type of Jew identified by Noah as one who "claims all the famous dead and flings them into the faces of prejudiced persons like bits of coloured paper" (168). For Panofsky, the inefficacy of all of history's Jewish heroes against the intractable anti-Semitism of the *Goyim* is testament to the truth of Marxism and the necessity of the revolution, and, of course, provides the basis for his particular interpretation of Wolf Adler's death:

We discovered cures and it didn't help and we made for them philosophies and they chased us away and invented so they'd take the invention and deport the inventor and we made beautiful pictures and books and they weren't ours and even money — which is the cheapest of things — they wouldn't let us keep. Always tenants, never landlords. Anyway, now newer ones are already back there in that fertile land making believe that history goes backwards... But you go talk to the *Goyim*. You go if you want and tell them. Marx and Spinoza, tell them Trotsky too, tell them Einstein and Freud, tell them ... that a small man died for nothing in a fire... and made for us a smaller hero than we usually put up. (155)

A highly ambiguous event at its centre, one that lends itself to a variety of interpretations and uses, and a remarkably enigmatic character the catalyst of that event, *Son of a Smaller Hero* unites the theme of the quest for identity with that of the uses of history. Indeed one could read the novel as an exploration of the use of history as a weapon, not only in a war of competing ideologies, but of competing identities and in the related struggle to succeed in an urban vertical mosaic where ethnic and class boundaries and identities sustain each other in a paradoxical process that both nourishes and destroys individuals. The binary sensibility that renders a fictional ghetto at once hated and loved also expresses an ambivalence toward the historical interpretations of heroism and culpability that shape and sustain group identities.²⁵

An awareness of the significance of language as creator and purveyor of these events and identities is inherent in the novel's structure, made up, as it is, of chapters that carry the names of various characters who present therein their interpretation of the central event, and in the characterization of Wolf Adler. Wolf, though seemingly superficial, is a man who goes to

25 For a thought-provoking commentary that uses a case study as the basis for a theoretical discussion of the relationship between history and identity, particularly in a multicultural society, see Howard Aster, "Jews and Ukrainians in Canada in the Aftermath of the Deschênes Commission: An Opinion," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XIX.2 (1986): 79-88.

great lengths to keep his inner self inaccessible by writing his diary in a private code. Ironically, however, once deciphered, the code reveals not depths, but surfaces, or as George Woodcock puts it in his introduction to the novel, "a secret life of terrifying banality" (x). Wolf's deciphered diary is a minute record of how many steps he walks each day, the average number of steps in a trip to the toilet, the number of hours wasted yearly in sleep. Through this graphic discrepancy between medium and message, Richler suggests a troubling confusion, an unsettling facelessness at the core of Jewish identity. "He died a Jew," (153) says the Rabbi at Wolf Adler's funeral as he extols the heroism of the departed, yet Wolf Adler has been variously presented as victim, scoundrel, and insipid weakling as well as hero. The question of who his father and the quintessential Jew really is, if indeed the latter exists, haunts Noah's avowed quest for his own identity, for "some knowledge of himself that was independent of others" (198). And it is a quest that necessitates a journey through labyrinths and mirrors, complicated as it is by the seeming dependence of ethnic identity on victims and villains, the difficulty of distinguishing between the two and Noah's own ambivalence — his nostalgic longing for something that "one could wholly belong to" uncompromised by "butts and parenthesis" (169) and his equally fierce determination to discover himself *per se*, independent of any group dynamics.

It is interesting to note at this point that Noah, in quest of identity, like his counterparts in other fictions of ethnicity, including those whose search is more directly linked with achieving material success, requires the assistance of a Beatrice. The protagonist's love affair, even marriage, with a *shiksa* is an inevitable and integral element in Richler's fictional world. The non-Jewish woman becomes a link not only to the world of tender and erotic emotion, but also to the physical and social territories beyond the ghetto, and a symbol of both rebellion and success. Noah is irresistibly drawn to Professor Hall's wife, Miriam; Duddy depends heavily, for both emotional and practical support on Yvette, though interestingly, he discounts somewhat her potency as a *shiksa* because she is French Canadian rather than WASP.

Similarly, Paci's characters, both male and female, are frequently dependent on their lovers, often, but not always, non-Italians. In *The Father*, Stefano Mancuso depends on Anna, his passionate Ukrainian-Canadian girlfriend, to put him in touch with his own emotions and to help him integrate his mind and heart, thereby coming to grips with his ethnicity. Marie in *Black Madonna* is drawn to and marries the cool, WASPY, Richard as part of her effort to free herself from the powerful influence of her

mother. Sandor Hunyadi in *Under the Ribs of Death* depends on Mary Kostaniuk, whom he eventually marries, as his link to human warmth and, ultimately, for his salvation. Often these relationships are positive, humanizing forces in the lives of the troubled and driven ethnic protagonists; but also, often, as with Noah's relationship with Miriam and particularly as with Duddy's relationship with Yvette, they are based on the same ambiguous victim/oppressor dynamic that underlies the conflict between ethnic identity and upward mobility.

The fuzziness of the distinction between victim and oppressor, hero and villain, is also dramatized again and again in other ways in Canada's Fiction of Ethnicity. Though open to less sinister interpretations than Wolf Adler's supposed attempt to rescue the Torah, Isaac's motivations for a similar act in *The Sacrifice* — rescuing the Torah from a burning synagogue — are also unclear, even to himself, thus rendering indeterminate the final meaning of the act and his subsequent death. But the moral ambiguity of the world depicted in *The Sacrifice* is most dramatically captured in the central event of the novel — Abraham's ritual murder of Laiah. Abraham is a classic victim — of East European pogroms in which two of his sons were killed, of the immigrant experience itself which requires him, a man well into middle age, to make enormous adaptations to bridge the gap between life in an old-world *shetl* and life on a North American frontier city: to "dance to the tune of the stranger." Yet Abraham also becomes a knife-wielding murderer who slaughters the irritating, but nevertheless largely innocent Laiah in a bizarre, mad attempt to right moral imbalance through the ancient ritual of sacrifice.

Profound moral ambiguity is also at the uncertain centre of the universe depicted in *Under the Ribs of Death*, again dramatized through the interplay of victim/villain characters whose actions can be variously interpreted depending on who is viewing them and in what light. This interplay is often within the ethnic ghetto, but at the same time it is always set against the broader context of the same interplay between the powerful 'other' — the 'English,' the *Goy*, the 'stranger' — and the ethnic characters. Sandor is clearly a victim of Mr. Nagy's obsessive, small-minded avarice, but Nagy too, Hungarian immigrant, has been the victim of the stereotyping and discrimination that Sandor encounters when he tries to do business outside the North End. And victim Sandor becomes villain as the unfeeling landlord who evicts poor tenants from Nagy's squalid properties when they are unable to pay the rent. Sandor's Uncle Janos is also a victim, of an unhappy marriage to Fraulein Kleinholtz, yet he is guilty of having lied to her in order to marry her for her money. Even the nearly unrelentingly villainous

Fraulein, ugly, grasping, witchlike, becomes a victim when she tells her own story of having been deserted by her first husband. And, at the novel's end, one must once again wonder about Sandor and whether he is a victim of the vertical mosaic, or of his own gullibility, his own willingness to be seduced by the materialistic world that collapses around him during the Great Depression.

Moral ambiguity is similarly dramatized in Paci's work. Assunta Barone in *The Black Madonna* is another classic victim — of extreme poverty in Italy, of the new world, to which she has been unable to adapt and to which she has, in large measure, lost her children; and yet she is also guilty, albeit unwittingly, of tyrannizing her children, distorting their lives, and her final victimization — her severe depression and death, perhaps suicide — leaves them a potentially crippling inheritance. To draw on another example, Jacob Grossman, the central character in Henry Kreisel's *The Rich Man*²⁶ also inhabits a morally ambiguous world in which he is both victim and villain: victim of the vertical mosaic as an immigrant in Toronto, where he has never been able to move beyond a menial factory job; of the gulf between the old world and the new, particularly of the promised-land mythology long a product of that gulf, and most of all, of the conditions in Europe that produced the holocaust. Yet all of these elements of his victimization converge, turning him into a kind of passive villain, who deceives his family with false hope when their need is incalculably dire.

But perhaps the most vivid exploration of the moral ambiguity that makes it impossible to distinguish victims from villains, and certainly the novel most satirically critical of the type of ethnic identity that depends on embracing victimization is *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. The chief embodiments of this ambiguity are The Boy Wonder, the epileptic, Virgil Roseboro and Duddy himself, and their interaction with each other. As a ghetto folk hero, a St. Urbain Street boy who made good, the Wonder is a palpable presence for Duddy from his childhood, though the Wonder doesn't actually appear until midway through the novel. Magnified and transformed by the power of the word, Jerry Dingleman, 'the boy wonder,' is a man who, like Wolf Adler in *Son*, is a chameleon. An unscrupulous drug dealer who uses the young and admiring Duddy to smuggle cocaine across the border for him, the Wonder is also "a God-fearing man" who "didn't smoke or drive his car or place bets on the Sabbath" (131). Made incredibly wealthy by various

seedy deals and underworld manoeuvres, reputed to be visited by "three or four girls at a time" and to have a taste for "some dirty specialties" enhanced by "incredible films imported from Europe, books of photographs, amazing statues," the Boy Wonder is nevertheless community minded, one who "remembered well his own early hardships, and... liked to lend a helping hand" (131). In this humanitarian spirit, the Wonder sets aside Wednesdays ("known to his inner circle as Schnorrer's Day") to listen to the stories of a series of 'suplicants' seeking various kinds of favours.

But the Wonder is not just a kind of Robin Hood villain/benefactor. He is also himself a victim of polio, a cripple, whose legs were "twisted and useless" and is therefore confined to a wheelchair. However, Jerry Dingleman's misfortune turns him not only into a pitiable victim, but also into a kind of monster:

Polio wrought immense physical changes in Jerry Dingleman. At thirty he was no longer a handsome man. His shoulders and chest developed enormously and his legs dwindled to thin bony sticks. He put on lots of weight... The bony head suddenly seemed massive. The grey inquisitor's eyes, whether hidden behind dark glasses... or flashing under rimless ones, unfailingly led people to look over his shoulder down at the floor. His curly hair had dried... But the most noticeable and unexplained change was in the flesh of his face. After his illness it turned red and wet and shiny. His teeth, however, remained as white as ever and his smile was still unnervingly fresh... The smile that somehow retained an aura of innocence made those who feared or disliked the Boy Wonder resent him all the more. (133)

Richler thus portrays The Wonder as an enigmatic presence about whom "little was known for certain" (134), a combination of 'hero, villain, victim, monster,' ultimately undecipherable.

Considerably less enigmatic than the Boy Wonder, Virgil Roseboro is an innocent, one whose essential goodness and devotion make him a natural target for schemers like Duddy. Paradoxically, however, his culpability lies in his innocence, which inspires evil. Being an epileptic as well makes him doubly the victim and not only the catalyst/victim for Duddy's most depraved act in his desperate attempt to succeed, but also the chief vehicle for Richler's satire of victimized ethnicity. An aspiring poet, Virgil decides to publish a newsletter for epileptics which, with its selective use of history and heroes, or didactic literature and emotion-laden rhetoric to rally solidarity and spark political activism, is a black parody of typical organs of ethnicity and minority status that depend for their existence on the very victimization they attempt to fight. Virgil's "The Crusader" with its series on "Famous

26 Henry Kreisel, *The Rich Man* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1971, originally published by McClelland and Stewart 1948).

Health Handicappers Through History" and its "fighting editorial" advising "health handicappers to take a leaf from the book of the negroes, Jews and homosexuals" and "organise to protect themselves," and its Personals Column, where desperate pleas for companionship bear testimony to the deep human need for a community, even if it be a community of victims, apes, in both form and substance, many an ethnic periodical (269-273). However, though Richler's satiric intent is obvious, its force is softened somewhat by an almost grudging empathy for the victim and his needs.

Duddy himself is an embodiment of this same ambivalent tone. Though one is inclined to read Duddy's declaration that "all I needed was to be born rich and I would have grown up such a fine regular guy... a regular prince among men" (298) as dramatic irony, he is, nevertheless a complex combination of qualities, including those of the victim and picaresque hero as well as the unredeemable scoundrel. That Duddy is the latter is revoltingly clear by the end of the novel when, desperate for the \$2,200 that will finally seal his claim on the Ste. Agathe land he has been pursuing so relentlessly, after contemplating the going price for blood and bodies, and asking himself, "Was there anything valuable he could steal?" (297) Duddy forges the signature of the now paraplegic Virgil. Virgil, who is the victim of an accident for which Duddy is at least partially responsible, is totally dependent on this money for his livelihood. Thus Virgil's naive admiration of Duddy's entrepreneurship, his praise that "Duddy can do anything" (304), becomes an ironic comment on the depths of Duddy's depravity, just as Duddy's self-satisfied question, asked earlier of Yvette, "What's your opinion of Duddy Kravitz now?" (220) is laden with dramatic irony, since by the end of the novel Duddy has proven himself the equal of the Boy Wonder, and thereby horrified and disgusted the very people he thought he would please most, Yvette, and particularly his grandfather.

Another key element in the profound irony of Duddy's ultimate 'victory' is that he has won it, not only by preying on others, particularly Virgil, but also by taking advantage of the victimization of his own people, since anti-Semitism prompts the Ste. Agathe farmers to sell to Duddy, who uses Yvette as his front, rather than to Jerry Dingleman, the Jewish wheeler dealer.

But if Duddy uses his group's victimization for his own ends, he too is nevertheless a victim. Despite his justified revulsion toward Duddy's methods of acquiring the land, and toward Duddy's materialistic plans for exploiting it, Duddy's Zeyda, with his constant peasant's refrain that "a man without land is nobody" and his immigrant's desire for his progeny to do well, bears some responsibility for Duddy's misguided obsession. So too does Max, Duddy's jovial, storytelling father. With his admirable family-man qualities

— his love for his dead wife, his seemingly genuine parental concern for the welfare of his sons — existing alongside his shocking amorality as exemplified in his seedy career as a pimp and his constant elevation of the Boy Wonder to the hero of the ghetto, Max is a caricature of Jewish fatherhood. His own distorted perceptions nurture distortions in his son, also a caricature, of the aspiring younger generation. Like the seemingly faceless and weak Wolf Adler, Max suggests ineptitude, confusion, even decay at the centre of ethnic identity — a centre that 'will not hold.' Duddy's obsession, his amorality, which exists alongside his sterling devotion to family, as exemplified in his efforts to extricate his brother from a difficult situation, and in his willingness to travel to New York to help his cancer-stricken Uncle Benji, has been nourished by his personal and collective inheritance, and by the gap between the immigrant ghetto and the elusive North American dream of success. And Duddy is a victim of both his inheritance and that dream.

Despite this obvious burlesquing of the immigrant experience, Richler's tone, like that of the Fiction of Ethnicity generally, remains ambivalent throughout Duddy's climb from ghetto boy to land owner. Indeed, in his depiction of Duddy, Richler projects some of the same admiration that Max infuses into his tales of the Boy Wonder. Duddy, despite his seemingly boundless capacity for exploitation, moves through Richler's fictional landscape with a kind of picaresque charm.²⁷ This is apparent for example, in Duddy's adventures as a waiter, in which he shines as a kind of topsy-turvy Jewish version of the Algerian hero. It is also apparent in the confrontation between Duddy and his rich uncle, Benji, who has chosen the genteel Englishman as his model, rather than the underworld operator from the ethnic ghetto. Benji accuses Duddy of being "a *pusherke* ... a little Jew Boy on the make. Guys like you make me sick and ashamed." When Duddy counters with the impassioned comment that "You lousy intelligent people, you lying sons-of-bitches with your books and your socialism and your sneers, you give me a long pain in the ass" (240), one feels Richler's ambivalent sympathy with Duddy for his perverse authenticity. In this scene, Richler not only reveals his ambivalence toward these characters and the aspects of group identity that they represent, but also dissects the ethnic sensibility produced by the dynamics of the vertical mosaic, what one of Richler's characters calls the "ghetto mentality" (223). Each pose — Uncle Benji's as the imitative colonial sycophant and Duddy's as the amoral

27 See J.A. Wainwright, "Neither Jekyll nor Hyde, In Defence of Duddy Kravitz," *Canadian Literature* 80 (Summer 1981): 56-73.

hustler — is a reaction to the paradoxical but potent juxtaposition of the limitless possibilities in New World fantasies, with the limits, both tangible and intangible, inherent in the vertical mosaic. Like characters in other novels of immigrant and ethnic experience, both Benji and Duddy must pay a price for whatever degree of 'success' their respective strategies effect and that price involves an inter-related loss of their integrity, their ethnic identity and even, it is sometimes implied, their humanity.

PART III: THE GAP BETWEEN ILLUSION AND REALITY

In addition to exploring the subtle symbiosis between victors and victims in the struggle to realize New World dreams and the way in which the dynamics of this process obscure the distinction between the two, writers who depict immigrant and ethnic experience in Canada also explore the related and equally ambiguous dynamics between illusion and reality, laying bare the particular susceptibility of the 'ghetto mentality' to blurred perception and dramatizing the tragi-comic effects of mistaking illusion for reality in the vertical mosaic. The dramatic irony so often underlying the plot in ethnic novels, like the ironic tone that often dominates them, both depends on and highlights the gap between illusion and reality, surface and essence which the ethnic protagonist fails to see, often until it is too late, sometimes never.

Such dramatic irony is central, both structurally and thematically to *Son of a Smaller Hero*, in which the characters, (including minor ones such as the assimilated Goldenbergs whose seemingly idyllic suburban routines mask dark traumas, and major ones, such as Noah's grandfather, Melech Adler, whose stern patriarchy hides an Old World love affair), lead lives of self-delusion. And of course the novel's central event, the supposed heroic death of Wolf Adler bears ironic testimony to the power of myth and tradition to transform a private illusion into a public one that then further nourishes private deception. This dynamic and ironic interaction between illusion and reality is also central to *The Apprenticeship*, in which Duddy, despite Richter's ambivalent portrayal of him, is ultimately the butt of bitter dramatic irony that reveals him as incapable of perceiving the nature of his actions. When he triumphantly surveys his land at the end of the novel, Duddy, in his driven pursuit of his grandfather's pastoral vision, has become an agent of destruction: not 'a somebody' as he had intended, but a man beyond community, a nobody.

In *Under the Ribs of Death* John Marlyn also uses irony to dramatize the interplay between illusion and reality as a powerful element in immigrant

and ethnic experience. In the novel as a whole, as much as in the philosophical argument between Sandor's father and the barber, Mr. Schiller, "the question of the nature of reality is under discussion" (127). And ironically, it is Sandor who asserts in this discussion that "I just believe in things the way they are" (128). As John Roberts points out in an article discussing Marlyn's use of irony, Sandor must 'deceive himself' over and over again since the price for the success he craves is that he "abandon his organic identity."

But deception is only possible in a world where differing versions of truth exist or can be created... Irony is intrinsic to a problematic reality... It embodies a contradiction between the human desire for ultimate truth and the realization that no truth exists... Although Marlyn utilizes irony to illuminate this world of shifting perspectives, he does so not to prove that reality is unknowable, but to warn against the pitfalls in the process of unmasking it.²⁸

The experience that Sandor undergoes in 'unmasking' a series of inter-related illusions is, not surprisingly, the process of his growing up, of his journeying from an innocence that makes it difficult for him to determine which road leads to paradise and which to the inferno, to a knowledge, or at least wariness, that comes from his having been scorched by the infernal flame that he finds at the core of what he thought to be paradise.

As a child, unable to see beneath surfaces, Sandor assumes that changing his name will obliterate his ethnicity, just as he naively supposes that his Uncle Janos "is a foreigner no longer" (79) once he is transformed by a haircut and new clothes. Similarly, he assumes that his friend Eric, being "rich and English" cannot be anything but happy, despite his eyes that were "an old man's, grave and deep set and sad" (70). The sharpness of the contrast Sandor encounters between his Henry Street world and Eric's wealthy suburb unsettles somewhat his sense of reality. Contemplating the pastoral expanses of Eric's garden, Sandor reflects that "In a little while it would all be over... and he would be back on Henry Avenue. In a few days the things he had seen here would grow unreal and would begin to wonder if he has imagined them" (67). But after secretly scrutinizing the splendid interior of the home of one of his employers, Sandor decides that "This was it... the real thing. Comfort, wealth and beauty" (68). And this contact with

28 John Roberts, "John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death*, Irony in an Immigrant Novel," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XIV.1 (1982): 41.

what Sandor decides is 'the real thing' is, for him, a kind of epiphany that solidifies his previously inchoate longing into a commitment to realizing the North American dream of material success. He is immediately drawn into "dreaming of the future... a future now so immeasurably widened and filled with things to possess" (68) and "Sandor raised his head. It was true, a vast gulf separated this world from his, but he had spanned it: in one stride had crossed over to taste, to see and forever invest his dreams with the vision of it. He laughed at the magnitude of his achievement" (74).

As Sandor journeys toward this dream, this new world paradise symbolized for him in Eric's garden, he continues to be deceived by surfaces: Nagy seems to him to be the epitome of success because he has a business — he works at a desk in an office, unlike his father, a janitor; later, he is "lured by a dream of splendid affluence" in which he sees himself "living next door to Eric" into thinking that his family could all be happy if his uncle married for money a woman he does not love. But Sandor experiences the shattering of each of these and other related illusions until he is, ironically, back once again in Henry Street, shorn of his modest financial gain, his faith in the dream of success. Though the novel's ending is sufficiently ambiguous to leave one wondering about the degree to which Sandor has "unmasked reality,"²⁹ it seems clear that, unlike Duddy Kravitz, he has gained some insight from his journey, that he is at least beginning to suspect that reality is somehow to be found in familial and communal relationships rather than in a 'success' that is measured in possessions.

Like Marlyn's Sandor, Frank Paci's second-generation Italian characters are compelled to grapple with competing, and therefore problematic realities, and destined to "encounter pitfalls in the process of unmasking" truth, or at least some workable version of it. Paci depicts this process with a sensitive, gentle irony that allows the reader to see through his characters' self deception, while sympathizing with them. For example, all three of the children in *The Italians* — Lorianne, Aldo and Bill — are seduced by illusions: as a result, each of them develops a distorted, unbalanced personality. All seek in illusion a means of escaping some aspect of life, usually non-material, that they find difficult. Lorianne seeks to escape her

own sexuality, despite her marriage to the passionate Lorenzo, through a highly personal religious asceticism. Aldo, too, seeks refuge from the strain of interpersonal relationships including sexual ones, and from his physical limitations, in the priesthood. Bill, on the other hand, is drawn to the dream of being a hockey star for the NHL, partly to escape intellectual demands, but primarily to escape his ethnicity. Indeed, for all three, the 'burden' of their ethnicity is a key element in the nature of the illusions that seduce them and in their need to escape. Aldo, for example, "Frail from birth... had shunned the team sports that served as a melting pot for the Italian and Canadian kids in his neighborhood... It had been difficult for him to make friends with the Canadian kids and the Italian kids taunted him" (62).

As well, for all of them, the competing realities in their lives are the products of the various contrasting binary patterns that are intrinsic to the immigrant experience: the gap between Old World and New, European parent and North American child, the English language and the Italian, and between the various geographic spaces and socioeconomic levels within the vertical mosaic. Their escapes from these tensions prove illusory for all three of them; like Bill, who finds that even though "He thought he had escaped their [his parents'] world for the time being by imagining himself doing all sorts of incredible feats in national league games... it always managed to intrude" (49), they must all ultimately face both their personal inadequacies and their ethnicity before they can 'unmask reality.' For Paci, in *The Italians* as in *The Father*, the unmasking consists in coming to understand and practice the principle of the golden mean, of being able to avoid crippling extremes that result from cutting off one part of oneself from another, whether it be by divorcing mind or body from heart, public identity from private, or ethnicity from Canadian identity. In *The Father* Stephen "wants to understand the real world," but he assumes that he will find it in logic, not poetry, the mind, not the heart (110). The novel traces the growth of his capacity to feel and understand a broader reality. As Father Sarlo tells him, "the longest yard in existence" is the distance from "forehead to chest" (94) and the journey required to bridge this distance and the related distances between the various polarities that fragment immigrant and ethnic experience is, for Paci, the journey from illusion to reality and from an identity in crisis to one that is whole.

Apart from Marlyn, Paci, Richler, and Wiseman, examples I discussed above, the novel that dramatizes most starkly the potential for tragedy inherent in the gap between illusion and reality is Henry Kreisels's *The Rich Man*. Here the promised-land mythology comes full circle in the return

29 Roberts reads the ending as a positive one. I have elsewhere discussed it as an example of the overall bleakness of the fictional depiction of urban ethnic experience on the prairies. See T. Palmer, "Ethnic Response to the Canadian Prairies, 1900-1950: A Literary Perspective on Perceptions of the Physical and Social Environment," *Prairie Forum* XLII.1 (Spring 1987): 49-74.

home to Europe of Jacob Grossman, an Austrian Jew who had emigrated to North America, eventually settling in Toronto, thirty three years before the story begins. However, Kreisel scrutinizes both halves of the myth — the immigrant finds streets of gold in the Edenic New World, and the immigrant eventually returns in triumph, bearing gifts to his admiring and envious old-world family and friends, thereby, fortifying their idyllic vision of 'America.' Dramatic irony permeates every aspect of this novel — an irony that is grounded not only in the discrepancy between Jacob's poverty and his pretensions, but also in the interplay between the setting, Austria, 1935, and the reader's knowledge of subsequent events. And it is through this irony that Kreisel, like Marilyn and Richler, illuminates the interplay between illusion and reality that permeates immigrant experience, the role of cultural mythology in this interplay, and its consequences in the lives of individuals.

The Rich Man is, of course, an ironic title because Jacob is in fact a poor man who lives "in one of the poorer districts of Toronto" (14) and who has worked for over thirty years at the same job as a presser in a garment factory. As Jacob views New York harbour from the ship's upper deck when he begins his mythological return journey, he recalls that when he arrived there over thirty years before, he was obliged to view the harbor from the steerage deck: the situation is one that should fit perfectly into the promised land mythology, except that when Jacob "first set foot on the New World" he discovered "to his great disappointment that the streets were paved with stone and not with gold" (26). Indeed, Kreisel's description of the factory where Jacob has worked for most of his adult life suggests that not only has he failed to find the paradise symbolized by golden streets, but has, in fact found, like Alberto Gaetano in *The Italians*, a kind of inferno, a satanic mill, where he works in "the hottest part" daily assaulted by "the steady vibrating hum of whirring... machines" and the "stale smell of cloth mingled with the steam of the Hoffman presses and the sweat of hundreds of workers...." Here Jacob has not "made a name for himself" as the myth would have it; rather, he is known to the factory managers by his time card number, "No. 1003" (15).

Nor is Jacob truly at home in the New World. His outsider's alienation and discomfort as well as his subordinate status is graphically revealed in the obsequious manner he adopts when asking for a leave of absence from work, and in his halting, broken English:

Jacob Grossman went shyly into the office. He walked slowly to the chair which the manager offered him and sat down clumsily... He was thinking hard trying to find the right beginning. He stammered a few words and then he was quiet... 'I wished I could

talk in Yiddish mit you Mistah Donken. It is not good for me to talk in English over serious t'ings.' (17)

But Jacob is able to escape from this soul-destroying reality through illusions that re-shape his life's story into a narrative congruent with the promised-land mythology. Through hard work, he and his wife have been able to put their son through medical school, so Jacob has begun to realize his dream of success through him. He has also, through letters home over the years, misled his mother about his work and his financial situation. But the return trip itself is the key element in Jacob's self deception. It allows him to escape the position and identity imposed on him by the vertical mosaic since it provides him with an audience, people who, abetted by the combination of myth and Jacob's deception, see him as the rich man, the fulfillment of their European dreams of the New World.

The very act of preparing for the return journey brings Jacob closer in his own mind to being his family's 'rich American uncle.' In a scene strongly reminiscent of a key scene in *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel about the power and elusiveness of the American dream of success, in which Gatsby displays for Nick, with an almost religious intensity, his closet filled with expensive shirts, we see Jacob laying out on his bed all the gifts he has purchased for his European relatives. This act begins his illusory transformation from poor immigrant to rich man:

A feeling of achievement and great satisfaction came over him as he looked at the paper-wrapped parcels on the bed. Tenderly he picked them up, took off the paper, and laid all the things he had bought gently on the bed. And then he looked at the gifts spread out before him, almost covering the whole surface of the bed, and he felt that this was one of the moments he would long cherish and remember, for here, tangible and real, was part of a dream materialized. He would come back to visit his mother and his sisters like a merchant arriving after long travels in foreign lands, bearing great gifts... (24).

But just as Jacob gradually 'unmasks' the reality of life for poor Jews in the Vienna of 1935, he too is unmasked when tragedy strikes his sister's family, and he is unable to offer even minimal assistance, since he has spent all his money fulfilling the demands of an illusory mythology. Ironically, he leaves Vienna after having to work very hard to destroy the illusion he has created by convincing his relatives, first, that he is not a rich man, but a poor one, not simply hard-hearted and selfish; and second not to tell his old mother the truth about him. He wants to spare both his mother and himself the pain of parting with an illusion that they both need to give meaning to

though not without some regret, on the grounds that not only is the price too high, but also, the reward is illusory.

In depicting the vertical mosaic from a perspective other than that of the genteel mainstream and dramatizing its power to 'make or mar' the lives of individuals, immigrant and ethnic writers bring a new and important dimension to Canadian literature. However, the Fiction of Ethnicity that emerges from these novels, and other literary forms as well that explore immigrant and ethnic experience, is in some significant ways oddly congruent with that older genteel literary sensibility, in its divided loyalties, its anxious preoccupation with victimization and in its ambivalent rejection of the American dream.³¹

Like the sensibility behind the Fiction of Ethnicity and the often tortured characters it creates, the Canadian cultural sensibility is that of a divided soul, a colonial mentality habituated to fearing its landscape and to defining itself against a more powerful cultural ethos that it both admires and despises, because its negative identity depends on it, while its emergent positive identity, constantly in history's shadow, must, like Noah Adler in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, struggle mightily to gain 'some knowledge' of itself "that [is] independent of others." As a "literature existing at an interface of two cultures... concerned with defining itself, its voice, the dialectic of self and other and the duplicities of self creation..." (Mandel 65), Canada's Fiction of Ethnicity, as well as exposing the divided soul of the immigrant, also mirrors and evokes some of the deep anxieties already very familiar to the English-Canadian sensibility.

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their lives. Jacob's deep sense of "anguish" (203) at his inability to provide the help his relatives so desperately need underscores the inadequacy of the promised land mythology, come full circle, to encompass either the North American immigrant experience within the vertical mosaic, or the Old World's long experience of human depravity. Indeed, it may at times, unwittingly, help to perpetuate both.

CONCLUSION

The vertical mosaic is a pervasive presence in Canadian literature dealing with immigrant and ethnic experience, particularly in the city. It is present most obviously in the fictional urban landscape, complex, tense and above all, non-egalitarian, that is created again and again in this literature: it is present in the crisis of identity that the immigrant and ethnic characters inevitably experience as they discover that 'moving up' often requires them to significantly modify, even obliterate their ethnicity. The vertical mosaic is also present in the fiction's preoccupation with and shifting assessment of victims and oppressors, heroes and villains, and with the broad gap between illusion and reality that the characters must inevitably struggle to bridge in the process of adapting, both physically and spiritually, to the New World. In short, Canada's Fiction of Ethnicity, a divided soul at the centre of its binary sensibility, is anxiously preoccupied with the dynamics of success and failure, a preoccupation fuelled not only by the promised land mythology that has for centuries provided a framework of meaning for immigration to the New World, but also by an encounter with the reality of the vertical mosaic — an encounter at times sufficiently traumatic to turn the mythological paradise into an inferno.

But that Fiction is not a simple, unambiguous victim's whine about the unfairness of it all. It is, rather, a critique, albeit at times somewhat ambivalent, of the rags-to-riches mythology that was a strong strand in 19th and early twentieth century American culture, and perhaps to a considerable degree, Canadian as well.³⁰ Whether adopting a humorous tone or a profoundly disillusioned one, writers of the urban ethnic experience use irony to both distance themselves from their characters' struggle and at the same time to come scorchingly close to it as they dissect the dynamics of upward mobility in Canada and the nature of success, ultimately rejecting it,

31 For a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of attitudes toward ethnicity as expressed in Canadian fiction, see Terrence Craig, *Racial Attitudes in English-Canadian Fiction, 1905-1980* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP 1987).

30 See Allan Smith, "The Myth of the Self-Made Man," *The Canadian Historical Review* LIX (June 1978): 189-219.