

asserting that the formal properties of fiction are not the subject matter of fiction: "It is no doubt part of the duties of Nabokov's critics and editors and annotators to detect what they can in his elaborate ruses, but their final duty is to avoid the entrapment within his strategies which Appel's edition [*The Annotated Lolita*] illustrates" (p. 32). Rambeau appears to be counseling critical detachment here, yet, at the same time, urging intense concentration: "The qualities [in art] of muteness, of being overheard, are what the literary critics must deal with, must articulate, must explain" (p. 25).

One of the most rewarding essays in *Nabokov's Fifth Arc*, Margaret Byrd Boegeman's "Invitation to a Beheading and the Many Shades of Kafka," employs an eclectic critical approach. An influence study, an exercise in genre, thematic, and linguistic criticism, the article argues persuasively the unlikely thesis that Cincinnatus C. serves as an emblem for Nabokov's planned crossing over from Russian to English composition. Furthermore, Boegeman's article is perhaps an augury that the next stage of Nabokov studies may see an attempt to combine referential and reflexive criticism in some new amalgam.

Victor J. Ramraj  
*MORDECAI RICHLER*  
Boston: Twayne, 1983. Pp. 154.

Arnold E. Davidson  
*MORDECAI RICHLER*  
New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1983. Pp. 203  
Reviewed by Allison Mitcham

Victor J. Ramraj's and Arnold E. Davidson's recent critical works on Mordecai Richler, both published in the United States, should help dispel Richler's early frustrations about being judged chiefly in Canada by standards he felt were provincial and inferior. One recalls Richler's protagonist saying in *Saint Urbain's Horseman* (1971): "If they [the Canadian reviews] were bad it would be humiliating, and if they were good it wouldn't be satisfying either." Such bitterness ought to be a thing of the past, as both Ramraj and Davidson make clear, while stressing that Richler now occupies a significant place in the world literary scene.

Ramraj, for instance, who is meticulously fair in crediting other critics with some of the ideas he subscribes to, draws attention to the number of well-known critics on both sides of the Atlantic who have, over the years, written on Richler's work. Anthony Burgess, Philip Toynbee, George Woodcock, Leslie Fiedler, Malcolm Ross, Desmond Pacey, and William New have all, Ramraj notes, had their say. Davidson leans most heavily for his commentary on George Woodcock's book on Mordecai Richler, which is also called *Mordecai Richler* (1970) and on Woodcock's essay "The Wheel of Exile" (1971). Indeed, so noticeable is Woodcock's influence on Davidson's work that one cannot help wondering whether Davidson's book would ever have been written without Woodcock's. True, he both subscribes to and, occasionally, refutes Woodcock's ideas directly; but at times he fails to acknowledge them. For instance, his chapter on Duddy Kravitz runs remarkably close—both in tone and substance—to parts of Woodcock's chapter on the same subject.

Davidson's assumption that Richler belongs in a world literary context is supported by allusions to other novelists as well as critics. His analogies take in such international literary figures as Hemingway, Camus, Bellow, and Fitzgerald. One of his analogies, however—an extensive one in Chapter 6 between Richler's *The Incomparable Atuk* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*—seems somewhat forced, especially the paragraph which begins: "These comic parallels to and mock inversions of *The Great Gatsby* bring us to the heart of Richler's novel *The Incomparable Atuk*" (p. 106).

Although, on the whole, Ramraj's and Davidson's books are thorough studies of Richler's development—from *The Acrobats* (1954) to *Joshua Then and Now* (1980)—Ramraj's is the more

satisfying work in every department. His work is not marred by the slips which weaken Davidson's now and then—as for instance when Davidson uses “ingénue” to describe “the young man first encountering life on his own” (p. 59). Ramraj's style is clear and unified and his plot summaries brief; his statements are balanced and so well substantiated that there are few which a knowledgeable reader would wish to question seriously. Moreover, Ramraj has an interesting and unifying thesis which catches the reader's attention at the outset and holds it throughout.

The central and unifying aspect of Richler's work, which Ramraj mentions on the first page of his book and keeps returning to throughout, is “Richler's ambivalence” (p. 1). Ramraj sees this ambivalence as both a strength and a weakness—but always as a distinguishing mark of Richler's fiction and his characters: “The ambivalent outlook, which Richler's protagonists share with him, is their primary hallmark” (p. 8). Ramraj argues convincingly that this ambivalence is the result of Richler's recognition of life's complexities and perplexities. “In providing the individual the opportunity of seeing both sides of an issue, the ambivalent vision encourages him to have the second thought, or to turn a more accommodating eye on human experience, or at least to hesitate to condemn out of hand human shortcomings and frailties” (p. 12). Ramraj goes on to persuade the reader that, because Richler does not see life or people in black and white terms, he is not primarily a satirist (one of the terms which has been used in an attempt to define him—by Davidson and others). Satirists are not noted for the duality of outlook which Ramraj terms Richler's “bifocal” or “binary” vision. Indeed, Ramraj notes, “In Richler's novels, the main personages are knowingly or unknowingly searching—futilely—for absolutes which would ease their indecisiveness and irresolution, and the novels are invariably plotted with this spiritual quest in mind” (p. 10).

Richler's ambivalence with respect to his characters is, however, more troublesome than is his general ambivalent attitude to life—and has provoked a good deal more controversy. With respect to one of Richler's best-known protagonists, Duddy Kravitz, Ramraj calls attention to the fact that some critics think that Richler censures Duddy, whereas others feel that he sympathizes with Duddy. Ramraj states that Richler's attitude is more complex than this, that “Richler himself has stated that Duddy is a character whom he both admires and despises” (p. 32). Davidson is not unaware of this aspect of Richler's work. Indeed, he makes one statement which very much resembles some of Ramraj's: “In Richler's best realistic fiction there is a kind of multifocal effect, a blurring of image that emphasizes the problems of judging” (p. 141). It is just that Davidson's focus throughout his book is not so clear, so balanced, or so consistent as Ramraj's.

John M. Ellis

*ONE FAIRY STORY TOO MANY: THE BROTHERS GRIMM  
AND THEIR TALES*

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. Pp. 209 + ix.

\$17.50.

Reviewed by Josef Schmidt

*One Fairy Story too Many* is one book too many! What could have been a witty and interesting commentary in article form about the Grimm Brothers' rather free mode of adaptation when incorporating source material into their canonical collection is, instead, a repetitive, overblown and, in terms of scholarship, questionable tome.

The subtitle should be understood sarcastically; and the first sentence of the *Preface* reiterates the dark insinuation by promising the reader: “This book examines the question of what the Grimms' fairy tales really are” (p. vii). Ellis proposes that their resource persons were mainly bourgeois family friends and acquaintances, and not the “simple folks” they largely invented as a literary cover; that even for the first edition they used undue liberty in rendering “originals” into their kind of prose, in that they “deliberately, persistently, and completely misrepresented the status of their tales: they made claims for them which they knew to be quite false” (p. viii); and that they guiltily destroyed the authentic manuscripts post factum (p. 50 f.).