

they are, and, more importantly, why they are who they are. At best these characters remain narrative tools, employed without a careful rationalization or understanding of their psychological dimensions. This is particularly noticeable in Kim's shifting relationships with her old and her new boyfriends, and in the conclusion in her sudden but narratively convenient adoption of the role of matchmaker between her father and her mother's old friend, Sylvia. It is not just the problems of adolescence that are complex; the characters that disclose them are by necessity even more so, as the writing of such authors as Martha Brooks, Julie Johnson, and Budge Wilson so often attests. Admittedly, there are rare moments in this story, such as when Kim remembers spending the night of her sixth birthday in the tree house, that begin to suggest the dynamics of character. But for the most part, the portrayal of Kim's triumph over her grief is as glib and mechanical as is Buzz's over drug dependence and Sam's over running away. It lacks the first ingredient that Kim's writing teacher prescribes for all "good writing": "It's got to be authentic."

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#### Canadian and Australian Satires of Adult Society

*Jacob Two-Two's First Spy Case.* Mordecai Richler. Illus. Norman Eyolfson. McClelland & Stewart, 1995. 138 pp. \$17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-7710-7471-9. *The Big Bazoohley.* Peter Carey. Illus. Abira Ali. Random House, 1995. 133 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-394-22463-9.

Both Mordecai Richler and Peter Carey are acclaimed authors of adult fiction. Canadian-born Richler has produced nine novels, including *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, *St. Urbain's Horseman*, and *Joshua Then and Now*, several screenplays, and a number of works of non-fiction. Carey, born in Australia, now living in New York, is the author of a number of novels, including the Booker-prize winning *Oscar and Lucinda* and, more recently, *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*. Richler demonstrated his facility with writing children's literature in 1975 with the publication of the highly successful *Jacob Two-Two and the Hooded Fang*. *Jacob Two-Two's First Spy Case* is the third of Richler's popular Two-Two series. Carey reveals himself to be equally at ease with this genre in his first children's novel, *The Big Bazoohley*. As writers of children's books, both Richler and Carey achieve a rare combination of humour and social commentary. Both see children as the victims of a social world created and run by adults, and yet both present young boys who find ways to empower themselves within the adult institutions they find nonsensical and often unfair. The integrity and ingenuity of both Jacob and Sam Kellow not only ensure their successful fight against the absurdities of adult society but also foreground for the reader, in a light-hearted way, the ease with which adults can underestimate and even victimize children.

In *Jacob Two-Two's First Spy Case* Jacob is eight (two times two times two) years old and is fighting against corruption in his private school, Privilege House.

His kindly old principal, Mr. Goodbody, retires and is replaced by Mr. I.M. Greedyguts, whose meanness is manifested by his capacity to eat enormous quantities of delicious food in front of his students, while he forces them to eat the revolting slop supplied by Perfectly Loathsome Leo Louse. Greedyguts and Leo are two of a delightful cast of despicable characters in this novel who specialize in making the lives of children miserable. In addition to Greedyguts and Leo Louse, we meet, once again, Jacob's teacher, Miss Sour Pickle; she turns out to be a closet hockey fan who watches the Canadiens while fully dressed in hockey gear, including skates, with a six-pack by her side, revelling in the very violence she condemns at school. Also amusing is the relationship between Perfectly Loathsome Leo and his mother. The love they share among the ruins of their miserliness is one of the funniest aspects of the novel.

Perhaps the most compelling feature, then, of Richler's Two-Two books is the way that the struggles of childhood are placed in the context of a flawed adult world. Unlike some children's authors, Richler provides no models of adult behaviour to emulate. The adults range from being well-meaning but somewhat flawed or misguided, like Jacob's parents, to humorously eccentric, like Mr. Dinglebat, to downright evil, self-centred, and hateful towards children, like Leo, his mother, and Mr. Greedyguts. This complex array of adult behaviour is viewed from the perspective of young Jacob who, like any child, wants on the one hand to be a part of the adult world, and on the other is leery of and frustrated by the unequal balance of power between adults and children. As is traditional in this series, Jacob finds a way to resolve his problem on his own (with some assistance from Mr. Dinglebat), in spite of the fact that he is still the "littlest in the family" and ignored by his older brothers and sisters. Like its predecessors, this book both foregrounds the difficulty of being a little kid in an adult world, a world in which his intentions are usually misunderstood, and celebrates that little kid's resourcefulness and his ability to resolve his own problems, much to the astonishment and delight of his parents and siblings. In the midst of its humour, nonsense, and magic, then, Richler's book addresses the serious issue of growing up, and Norman Eyolfson's wonderfully detailed illustrations, which depict the adults as sometimes menacing and always absurd, aptly demonstrate the child's perspective of the zany adult world.

Peter Carey's *The Big Bazoohley* provides a more serious critique of contemporary society than Richler's novel does. The eccentricity of Carey's adult characters is presented in the context of the growing commodification of children in our consumer-driven society. Sam Kellow is a nine-year-old boy whose parents are loving, creative, and spontaneous, but irresponsible about money. While in Toronto to sell one of his mother's magical miniature paintings, the Kellows stay at the very expensive Prince Redward Hotel, much to Sam's consternation, since he knows that until they sell the painting they have only fifty-three dollars and twenty cents. It also happens that the Perfecto Kiddo Contest is being held at the hotel while they are there. The contest is a means of advertising Perfecto Kiddo products, such as shampoo, conditioner, soaps, and creams. The Perfect Kid is the one who walks, talks, dances, and dresses with perfection, and, most importantly, demonstrates the beauty — and, by implication, market-necessity — of the

Perfecto Kiddo product line. So obsessed are the parents of these children (the prize money is \$10,000.00) that when Sam finds himself locked out of his parents' hotel room in the middle of the night and calls on another couple's door for help, they kidnap him so that he can take the place of their own beleaguered son, Wilfred, who has come down with chicken pox. Sam is scrubbed and shampooed until he no longer resembles his own baseball-capped, sweat-shirted self, and instead becomes a replica of Wilfred: a curly-haired cherub in a velvet suit who must learn to dance and twirl spaghetti. Sam turns out to be a disastrous contestant, but luckily for him the judge is impressed by Sam's authenticity in the midst of so many Perfecto Kiddo clones, and awards him first prize in spite of the fact that (or perhaps because) he dumps spaghetti on the arrogant kid sitting across from him.

Like Richler's story, *The Big Bazoohley* situates childhood in the context of a complex adult social world. Abira Ali's illustrations capture this complexity very well: with their subtle grey shadings, they suggest, alternatively, the magical, the mundane, and the sometimes surreal nature of Sam's life among adults. From Sam's perspective, Carey critiques the rampant consumerism of our culture and of its impact on children. The Perfecto Kiddo contest is a humorous but telling commentary on the way in which our children's identities are shaped by the marketing ploys of corporations and the extent to which parents are complicit in that process. The "ideal" notion of childhood made desirable by The Perfecto Kiddo company can be achieved only by buying and using their products. Carey asks us to consider the consequences of children becoming the targets of mass marketing campaigns, and suggests that the most troubling consequence is the way in which children's identities are conscripted and transformed. That the prize for having the most "perfect" kid is a huge sum of cash merely foregrounds Carey's fear that children themselves become the commodity in a marketplace that co-opts their identities as a value to be traded.

In the end Sam is a hero not because he exemplifies good manners and meticulous hygiene but because, in his father's words, he is the kind of boy "who would chance everything for his family." In the novel's epilogue, Carey asks us to rethink our priorities; here, the focus is not on material wealth or consumer goods, but rather on one of Vanessa Kellogg's magical miniature paintings, which depicts, among other things, the "very happy face" of Wilfred "wearing his [first] Blue Jays hat," signifying his ability, finally, to be a normal boy. The novel ends, then, with a celebration of creativity, of family, and of the right of a kid simply to be a kid.

Both Sam and Jacob Two-Two bring some much needed sanity to the worlds they inhabit and cause the more responsible adults in their lives, including their parents, to see children as both more vulnerable and more mature than the adults had previously realized. With their combination of humour and sensitivity to the child's perspective, both of these delightful books are a must-read for children and adults alike.

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