



Rita Letendre, *Koumtar*, 1974, acrylic on canvas, 66" x 120", Courtesy of the artist.

place to pursue the man behind the movie. His other works, such as *St. Urbain's Horseman*, *Cocksure* and *Son of a Smaller Hero* (all published by McClelland and Stewart Ltd., \$7.95, \$5.95 and \$1.75), are not so easily available, but they can be obtained by popping into any Canadian public library or by writing Books Canada, 33 East Tupper Street, Buffalo, New York 14203.

Margaret Atwood, poet, novelist and literary theoretician, has suggested that Canadian humour consists basically of Canadians laughing, in a mean-spirited way, at the cultural pretensions of other Canadians. Of Richler's *Cocksure* she says that "read as a Canadian fable-of-identity, (it) can be seen as Richler's map of the national inferiority complex." Mortimer (the protagonist, Canadian, white, Anglo-Saxon and Anglican) is an unassertive man, badly used by practically everyone in the book. But Richler's concept is more complex.

The book revolves around Mortimer's mild but persistent resistance to being taken over body and soul by the ultimate Hollywood tycoon, a grotesque known as the Star Maker. (The takeover of the body is intended to be literal; the Star Maker has the needed parts transplanted from his underlings as his own wear out, and he has his eye — or at any rate the eye he is using — on Mortimer's lymph gland system.) Richler is outraged by everyone in his book except Mortimer — by swinging Londoners, by Mortimer's Canadian wife, who is swept by the shallow tides of her own intellectual pretensions, by idiotically permissive schoolmasters and by many members of the British upper class.

Mortimer may, in Miss Atwood's view, be painfully Canadian, but the person he most resembles in fiction is the wronged husband in Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*. Waugh, however, had a narrower target, the amoral British smart set of the twenties and thirties, and a stern warning; England had better return to old virtues before all was lost. In *Cocksure* Richler seems to assume that all is already lost, and as Miss Atwood says, "The laughter is uneasy partly because of a lack of focus. We can see all the things Richler the moralist thinks are wrong, but we aren't sure exactly what alternatives he is offering, what modes of behaviour he would approve."



ST. URBAIN'S HORSEMAN is a better book, more ambitious but also more obscure. It concerns a Canadian TV writer working in London, Jacob Hersh, who becomes involved with an unsuccessful semi-crook with a high IQ, named Harry Stein. Harry, for complex reasons, including simple jealousy, involves Jacob in an embarrassing interlude which lands them both in criminal court. Harry is characterized by Jacob's lawyer as "flotsam. The driftwood that floats in the brackish waters of the I'm-All-Right-Jack society. Stroll through the streets of Soho, the back alleys of this once proud city, and within the shadow of Nelson's column you will uncover a plethora of Steins."

Jacob is characterized by Harry's lawyer as "well educated, successful, talented, married,