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THIRD SPACES: An Analysis of Ambivalence in Gérard Bessette’s *La bagarre* and *Les pédoagogues* and Mordecai Richler’s *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* and *The Street*

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Cette mémoire a été évaluée par un jury composé des personnes suivantes :

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Abstract

In Critical Practice, Catherine Belsey states how traditionally, classic realism is interpreted as a genre that “presents individuals whose traits of character, understood as essential and predominantly given, constrain the choices they make” (Belsey 74). Belsey’s claim is significant in that it articulates what is often the locus of tension and conflict in the genre: rigid, essentialist identity discourse. In summarizing and considering the various identity discourses at play within Mordecai Richler’s The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and The Street and Gérard Bessette’s La bagarre and Les pélagogues, the purpose of this thesis is to analyse how issues surrounding constructions of identity are dramatized in these classic realist, satirical texts in order to show how their cultural work in terms of identity can be understood as being more ambivalent than has heretofore often been thought.

The thesis’ theoretical focus is rooted primarily in post-colonial theory, especially the ways it interrogates representations of cultural and ethnic struggles for recognition and power that are a result of colonial and/or cultural hegemonic domination. More specifically, the thesis discusses and appropriates the theory and concepts of the post-colonial critic Homi K. Bhabha, particularly in terms of how the selected primary texts can be said to exemplify Bhabha’s notions of ambivalence, hybridity and a Third Space of identity; how the narratives’ main conflicts and tensions around identity can be better understood by looking at how some of the characters can be said to inhabit a Third Space. However, the thesis will also show that while Bhabha’s claim that instances of ambivalence, hybridity and the Third Space in the selected texts can be said to represent “neither the one[...], nor the Other[...] but something else besides which contests the terms and the territories of both [i.e. of competing identities],” (Bhabha 41) their concomitant essentialist discourses can be said to trouble the idealism of Bhabha’s faith in such notions. In short, this thesis posits that though the selected texts perform important cultural work via their complex problematizations of the ambivalence of said discourses, they also satirize and critique essentialist and ethnocentric discourses.
Résumé

Dans Critical Practice, Catherine Belsey explique comment, traditionnellement, le réalisme classique est envisagé comme un genre «présentant des individus dont les traits de caractère, données comme définitoires et innés, influencent les choix qu’ils font» (ma traduction Besley 74). L’affirmation de Belsey est significative dans la mesure où elle montre comment les discours identitaires rigides et essentialistes représentent la source de tensions et de conflits par excellence du genre. En résumant et en sous-pesant les divers discours identitaires ayant cours dans The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz et The Street de Mordecai Richler ainsi que dans La bagarre et Les pédagogues de Gérard Bessette, ce mémoire a pour objectif d’analyser comment ces romans, textes satiriques typiques du réalisme classique, mettent en récit les questions entourant la construction identitaire, de manière à jeter une lumière sur la part d’ambivalence propre à ces identités.

L’appui théorique de ce mémoire est inspiré principalement des théories post-coloniales, plus spécifiquement de la manière qu’elles ont d’interroger les représentations des luttes culturelles ou ethniques pour la reconnaissance et le pouvoir. Ce mémoire s’approprie plus précisément les concepts du théoricien post-colonialiste Homi K. Bhabha, dans le but de montrer comment les romans du corpus retenu incarnent la notion d’ambivalence, d’hybridité et de tiers-espace, et comment les principaux conflits identitaires mis en récit dans ces romans peuvent être mieux compris si l’on se penche sur les personnages qui transitent par ce tiers-espace. Notons toutefois que, malgré l’affirmation de Bhabha voulant que les moments d’ambivalence, d’hybridité et de tiers-espace ne représentent «ni l’un […], ni l’Autre […], mais encore autre chose qui conteste les termes et territoires des deux premiers» (Lieux de la culture 68), ce mémoire s’appliquera à démontrer que le discours identitaire essentialiste remet en question la foi de Bhabha en de telles idées. En résumé, ce mémoire postule que, même si ces romans démontent indéniablement les discours identitaires essentialistes en montrant des identités ambivalentes, ils s’appliquent surtout à se moquer et à critiquer les discours essentialistes et ethnocentristes.
Keywords

postcolonialism; ambivalence; hybridity; mimicry; Third Space; strategic essentialism; counter-hegemony

Mots-clés

postcolonialisme; l’ambivalence; l’hybridité; le mimétisme; l’essentialisme; tiers-espace l’essentialisme stratégique; contrehégémonie
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Introduction

In Five-Part Invention: A Literary History of Canada E. D. Blodgett, discussing Jewish-Canadian literature, invokes Michael Greenstein’s Third Solitudes and how it interrogates the historical progress of the aforementioned literature:

It is a history that turns upon the notion of diaspora, which prevents a conceptualization of history in a linear, chronological sense. The general meaning of ‘diaspora’ is caught in Greenstein’s expression, ‘a continual process of walking abroad,’ even back and forth, and being always in a ‘hyphenated “in-between” state.’ Such a view of diaspora argues, furthermore, with both the cyclical and dialectical notions of history; and the work of A.M. Klein, which is taken as a model of the existential situation of diaspora, ‘breaks circles [and] negates dialectical synthesis’ (Blodgett 224)

Greenstein’s title Third Solitudes is an allusion to Hugh MacLennan’s Two Solitudes, a novel that fictionalizes the relations and tensions between the ‘solitudes’ of Anglo and French Canadian cultures within Quebec. Greenstein’s third solitude is in reference to a Jewish-Canadian cultural solitude between or in addition to the other two. Blodgett continues to evoke Greenstein’s analysis of Jewish-Canadian authors such as Mordecai Richler, Leonard Cohen and Jack Ludwig, amongst others, suggesting that they all construct texts that enact Derrida’s notion of différence, that is, texts that in their rewriting of other texts transmute the world into a scene of eternal diaspora in which connections between origins and process are broken, and meaning can only be construed as a patchwork of trajectories going nowhere. Thus identities merge in
Richler, origins disappear in Leonard Cohen and Richler, and in Ludgwig, Levine, and Leonard Cohen ‘dissemination, unanswerable questions,’ are preferable to semantic closure (227)

Of the accomplished writers mentioned above, this thesis will partly focus on Mordecai Richler, analyzing two of his texts: *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* and *The Street*. If, as Greenstein by way of Blodgett suggests, Richler’s texts ‘merge identities’ and demonstrate that ‘origins disappear’, how are these conditions dramatized in his texts? How does Richler fictionalize the ‘eternal diaspora’ with characters who are ‘always in a hyphenated in-between state’? How do the narratives demonstrate the complex cultural relations in and between those supposed solitudes?

A contemporary of Mordecai Richler, Gérard Bessette was also adept at fictionalizing cultural relations within and between the solitudes of French and English Canadian cultures. Bessette’s *La bagarre* and *Les pédagogues*, like Richler’s texts selected for this thesis, narrate a historical time during the eve of the Quiet Revolution and thus fictionally foreground associative cultural and identity issues brought to the fore during this historic moment. It is the intention of this thesis to demonstrate how both authors dramatize the complex and dialogical issues of cultural, ethnic and class identity presented via various textual enunciations. These enunciations underline ambivalent and indeterminate issues surrounding identity that in turn trouble fixed, essentialist identititary discourse.

Given that identity is the main theme analyzed in this thesis it is worthwhile also foregrounding the shared, predominant literary form of these primary texts. I suggest that
the most basic, encompassing form that can be used to describe these texts is classic realism. I feel this term is adequate in relation to these texts, and most importantly its relation to their shared themes of identity, for as Catherine Belsey states in Critical Practice: “[s]ubjectivity is a major – perhaps the major – theme” in classic realism. Though Belsey’s above claim is mostly in relation to the 19th century novel and the broad realist tradition against which even the modernist novels of Joyce and Faulkner could be categorized, I would argue that the above qualifications of classic realism (including all other citations used in this thesis from Critical Practice) can be extended to describe not only the novels chosen for this thesis, but also for the text The Street. This is particularly evident when one considers how Belsey further elucidates the role of identity within the form by stating how classic realism “presents individuals whose traits of character, understood as essential and predominantly given, constrain the choices they make” (Belsey 74). Belsey subsequently states that “[i]n many cases the action itself represents a test of identity, putting identity in question by confronting the protagonist with alternative possible actions” (75). As will become evident throughout this thesis, the inherent characteristics of classic realism are evident in all four primary texts: La bagarre, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, Les pédagogues and The Street. Each one of these texts dramatizes complex formulations of identity which are frequently the locus and source of tension and conflict. Moreover, in keeping with Belsey’s account of classic realism texts’ “essential[ized] traits of character”, I will show how the selected texts represent essentialism in order to interrogate its various, corollary effects on the representation of identity within my selected texts.
Classic realism is not the only literary concept that binds these texts together; one of the most prevalent terms used in describing Mordecai Richler’s *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* and *The Street*, or Gérard Bessette’s *La bagarre* and *Les pédagogues*, is the genre of satire. These texts couple elements of classic realism with varying degrees of comic-realism, comic-satire, outright satire, and implicit and explicit moral stances. Bessette and Richler’s shared affinity with satire is mentioned by William H. New in his text *A History of Canadian Literature* where he points out how “[b]oth Bessette and Richler were trenchant satirists” (New 197). Satire as a genre is defined by Wendell Harris in the *Dictionary of Concepts in Literary Criticism and Theory*:

In summary the essential ingredients of satire are humor, a target against which the humor is directed, and, at least until this century [20th], an at least implicit ideal against which the target of the satire may be compared. Further characteristics frequently cited are vividness in describing folly or vice, which generally leads to the depiction of the unpleasant, obscene, or nasty; an apparent intention either to punish or cure; the evocation of a mixture of amusement and contempt; and the projection of a personal inability to abide wickedness or folly (Harris 358)

Elements of the above citation can be easily found in Bessette’s *La bagarre* (1958) when one interprets the main character Jules Lebeuf’s folly or vice in wanting to continuously cavort with his friends at the expense of finishing his studies at university or his potential novel. Or in his failed intention to help elevate the French Canadian people to a better social level. The caricatured co-workers such as Bouboule and Bill are targets for humour which nevertheless affirms the need of the implicit ideal to elevate the people beyond the ignorance perceived by Lebeuf. In *Social Realism in the French-Canadian*
Novel, critic Ben-Zion Shek appears to interpret Jules Lebeuf’s “superman” feats in the tavern fight where the novel (assumedly) gets its name, as a satirical depiction while also noting how “[l]ong, boring passages plus satire that turns into farce, are [...] drawbacks” (Shek 233) to the text. Yet where Shek may negatively identify certain aspects of how satire is used, such as the satirical way vernacular and elite language is caricatured in the text – “the bizarre characteristics of [several characters’] language but with little relation to the plot” (233) – other critics, as discussed below in Chapter 1, focus on the ambivalence of the various enunciations in the way they realistically depict the heterogeneity of Montreal and yet undermine the homogeneity of signifying the French Canadian people.

Satire is also a significant element in Richler’s The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. Consider George Woodcock’s statement in Introducing Mordecai Richler’s The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz that “the strong element of satire, merging into farce, [...] provides the necessary moving force of the novel” (Woodcock 53). For Woodcock Richler’s satire “tends to be social and cultural rather than in any broad way political” (54), and I would argue the same claim could be made about Bessette’s La bagarre in that it dramatizes and sometimes satirizes the cultural and social formulations of identity and how they engender the narrative’s conflict. Published just a year after La bagarre, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz follows the principal character Duddy Kravitz through his Icarun journey as he struggles to be a ‘somebody’ as a result of misunderstanding his grandfather’s idiom that ‘A man without land is nobody’. An idiom which, by and large, fuels Duddy’s tumultuous transition from adolescence to man. Largely because of this, Duddy Kravitz is a celebrated Canadian bildungsroman and in
this sense it is similar to *La bagarre* as it charts the main character’s movement from innocence to maturity. Also dramatized in both texts is socialism during the 30’s, 40’s and 50’s, though it is muted in *La bagarre* in spite of its representations labour unrest, it is however made more manifest in *Duddy Kravitz* through characters such as Uncle Benjy, Mr Friar and the effective intertextual usage of *God’s Little Acre*.²

Socialism, labour unions and workplace struggles in mid-twentieth century Quebec are also major themes in Bessette’s *Les pédagogues*. Bessette’s text, published in 1961, recounts how a teacher, Sarto Pellerin, attempts to form a teacher’s union after being fired from his job. Jules Lebeuf, the main character of *La bagarre*, reappears in this novel as a union organizer and attempts to help Sarto, despite undermining efforts by fellow teacher Yves Lambert. The main reason for Sarto’s dismissal is due to his questioning of the school board’s hiring practices when the hiring committee refuses to hire an immigrant teacher because of his assumed agnosticism. The motif of agnosticism that is dramatized in the novel can be said to carry a biographical charge as Bessette himself was not given a permanent teaching position apparently because he openly identified himself as an agnostic. This is worth noting because, as Glen Shortliffe claims, it is “a clear case […] of a long-cherished grudge to be got off the chest” (Shortliffe 40). Ben-Zion Shek confirms this point claiming that “the autobiographical nature of [the] incident evokes the author’s irony or rancour in isolation from the characters” (Shek 235), implying that this autobiographical tendency negatively affects the credibility of the narrative. This said, what is clear to Shek and other critics, such as Réjean Robidoux in his text *La création de Gérard Bessette*, is that the novel’s efficacy lies in fictionalizing the socio-political conflicts of the era.³
Out of the four texts, it is Mordecai Richler’s *The Street* (1969) that is published last. Though it differs by virtue of the fact that it is a series of short stories, it is however similar to the texts mentioned above as it effectively dramatizes socio-political and cultural conflicts during the same historic period in Quebec. Though this text is not a novel, the predominance of the first person point of view, does not, as Belsey remarks of the classic realist novel, “efface [...] its own status as discourse (Belsey 72). *The Street*’s “discourse” of the first person narrator is essentially that of “a kind of super-subject” “who directly addresses an individual reader who is [in turn] invited to respond equally directly to this interpellation.” (68) The text is nearly completely “declarative”, corresponding to Belsey’s claim that “[c]lassic realism clearly conforms to the modality Benveniste calls *declarative*, imparting ‘knowledge’ to a reader whose position is thereby stabilized, through a privileged discourse which is to varying degrees invisible.” (91). As indicated in my “Abstract” and elsewhere in this thesis, *The Street* generally fulfills the criterion that: “Classic realism tends to offer as the ‘obvious basis of its intelligibility the assumption that character, unified and coherent, is the source of action. Subjectivity is a major – perhaps the major – theme of classic realism.” (Belsey 73).

Richler’s quasi-autobiographical collection of stories is also akin to the previous three texts in presenting stories that satirically portray and implicitly critique characters who attempt to inhabit and defend various social, political and cultural dispositions. In *A Heideggerian Evaluation of Humanism in ‘The Street’*, Abdelhafid Gadhi states that:

By adopting a satirical treatment of his own community and because of his complete detachment in the portrayal of his people, Richler fulfills his role as an impartial social critic and by taking the standpoint of the ‘loser’s advocate’, not
withstanding his race and social standing, he is openly adhering to the ideals and values of humanism (Gadhi 102).

Rachel Brenner, however, disagrees with Gadhi’s claim of Richler’s non-partisanship, stating that “in spite of his conscious efforts to remain an impartial critic of both Jews and Gentiles, Richler is often unable to maintain the position of a disinterested critic. The pain of racial hatred experienced in his childhood coupled with the consciousness of the destruction of the Jews in Europe undermines his attempts at objectivity” (Brenner 145). Brenner uses, among many examples from Richler’s non-novelistic writing, a story from The Street entitled ‘Bambinger’ to demonstrate Richler’s impartiality. Both Brenner and Gadhi’s theses are based on the problematic premise that the narrator and author are one in the same; that the stories are Richler’s own biographical accounts. Although anyone aware of Richler’s biographical information cannot deny similarities between it and some of the stories presented in The Street, there is no definitive information to prove its fidelity to Richler’s own life. Both critics, however, highlight the fact that Richler is undeniably effective at portraying his contemporary cultural, social and political identity issues in a way that continues to make his works pertinent decades after their publication.

Throughout the brief descriptions of the above primary texts, it should become evident that issues of subjectivity and identity, coupled with their social, political and cultural corollaries serve as the principal impetus of the narratives. It is therefore clear that one cannot discuss identity within the texts without mentioning its interdiscursive dependence upon the social, cultural and political discourses that shape it. In the article ‘Who Needs Identity?’, Stuart Hall speaks to “the attempt to rearticulate the relationship
between subjects and discursive practices that the question of identity recurs” (Hall 16). Hall, rather than attempt to assign identity a determinate definition, claims that identity does not signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change […] Nor – if we translate this essentializing conception to the stage of cultural identity – is it that collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’ which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common (17).

Hall further elucidates how, above all, identities are constructed “through, not outside, difference” and that “identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside’, abjected […] The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure” (18). This reveals, Hall suggests, that the essential unities which identities proclaim are, rather, “constructed within the play of power and exclusion, and are the result, not of a natural and inevitable primordial totality but of the naturalized, over-determined process of ‘closure’” (18).

Hall’s invocation of the fallacy of ‘closure’ can be read as similar to how in Critical Practice, Catherine Belsey interrogates this concept in literature, particularly in reference to classic realism and how it is traditionally considered one of the characteristics of the form: “narrative which leads to closure, and a hierarchy of discourses which establishes the ‘truth’ of the story” (Belsey 70) This account, including her claim that “Classic realism tends to offer as the ‘obvious’ basis of its intelligibility the
assumption that character, unified and coherent, is the source of action” is later put into question when she states how the realist text’s attempt to

create a coherent and internally consistent fictive world […] in spite of itself, exposes incoherences, omissions, absences and transgressions which in turn reveal the inability of the language of ideology to create coherence. This becomes apparent because the contradiction between the diverse elements drawn from different discourses, the ideological project and the literary form, creates an absence at the centre of the work (Belsey 107)

This critique of the coherence or truth of a classic realist’s narrative can also be read as akin to Ludgwig, Levine, and Leonard Cohen’s usage of ‘dissemination, unanswerable questions, which are preferable to semantic closure’, and more importantly, as I will attempt to prove in this thesis, is congruent with the ambivalent discourses found in Richler and Bessette’s selected texts. Both Belsey and Hall highlight the over-determined and naturalized processes of discourse and subjectivity present in both the classic realist literary form and social constructions of classic realist identity. More importantly for my purposes, however, is the lineage of Hall’s appropriation of the term ‘closure’, as it is actually borrowed from post-colonial critic Homi K. Bhabha. Hall cites Bhabha’s ‘The Other Question’ where Bhabha discusses the problematic fantasy of ‘closure’, here employing it particularly in reference to colonial discourse:

The visibility of the racial/colonial Other is at once a point of identity (‘Look, a Negro’) and at the same time a problem for the attempted closure within discourse.
For the recognition of difference as ‘imaginary’ points of identity and origin [...] is
disturbed by the representation of splitting in the discourse (Bhabha 116)

The nature of ‘splitting’ Bhabha refers to is established earlier in the essay, particularly in
reference to acts of discrimination and stereotypes:

The role of fetishistic identification, in the construction of discriminatory
knowledges that depend on the ‘presence of difference’, is to provide a process of
splitting and multiple/contradictory belief at the point of enunciation and
subjectification. It is this crucial splitting of the ego which is represented in
Fanon’s description of the construction of the colonized subject as [an] effect of
stereotypical discourse: the subject primordially fixed and yet triply split between
incongruent knowledges of body, race, ancestors (115)

This splitting is one of the ways, Bhabha claims, that colonial discourse is reliant on
ambivalence. Here Bhahba suggests some concretized, discursive examples:

It is recognizably true that the chain of stereotypical signification is curiously
mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse, an articulation of multiple belief. The
black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants
(the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as
a child [...] In each case what is being dramatized is a separation – between races,
cultures, histories, within histories – a separation between before and after that
repeats obsessively the mythical moment or disjunction (118)
As I will further discuss in Chapter 1, Bhabha’s discussion of splitting is commensurate with ambivalence and it is in his essay ‘The Commitment to Theory’ where he articulates the connection between the two concepts:

The concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation. And it is the very authority of culture as a knowledge of referential truth which is at issue in the concept and moment of enunciation. The enunciative process introduces a split between the traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference, and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as a practice of domination, or resistance (51)

Like Hall’s article, Bhabha appropriates much from post-structuralist identified theorists such as Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. These theorists’ relation to post-colonial theory are discussed in Philip Leonard’s Nationality Between Poststructuralism and Postcolonial Theory. In his text, Leonard is concerned with how critics such as Terry Eagleton, Benita Parry, Aijaz Ahmad and others claim that poststructuralist theory “construes all social experience and cultural phenomena as a form of textuality” (Leonard 1) and that “[p]oststructuralist theory, as a result, is viewed as a static, schematic and systematic tradition – one hardening into theoretical dogma – that neither concerns itself with intercultural violence nor reflects, on its own status as metropolitan theory” (2). Leonard also claims, however, that Eagleton and other critics believe that “certain theorists – most notably Spivak and Bhabha – take poststructuralism
in different practical directions when they question the cultural violences that are associated with imperialism, colonialism, and postcoloniality” (2). That being said, it should be noted that critics such as Aijaz Ahmad and Benita Parry have both been critical of Bhabha’s theorization. Both Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak are two renowned postcolonial critics who are adept at discussing the struggles and politics inherent in formulations of identity (be it cultural, national, ethnic) that arise in situations where imperialist, colonial and/or postcolonial discourse is present. And it is these two theorists, but predominantly Bhabha, that informs the theoretical optic I will use throughout this thesis.

To conclude, this thesis’s purpose is not to demonstrate how the selected primary texts can be considered postcolonial, rather it is to demonstrate the various ways that issues of identity are dramatized by Bessette and Richler can benefit from some of the theoretical work by Bhabha, and to a lesser extent, by Spivak. For instance, using Bhabha’s notions of ambivalence, hybridity, mimicry, the incommensurability of cultures and the Third Space, I will demonstrate in Chapter 1 how a number of conflicts and moments of discord within the various narratives can be better understood when subjected to the likes of the aforementioned theoretical concepts and how the latter can also be said to be operative or at play in the selected texts. Furthermore, when these concepts are dramatized by these moments of conflict it becomes evident that they are frequently used temporarily. The cause of this temporariness is often because of competing, essentialist and ethnocentric identitary discourses that restrict and hinder certain characters from allowing to transgress their fixed and hermetic identities. In Chapter 2, I will also discuss the concept of counter-hegemony as well as appropriate
Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism and how both can be used to understand various moments in the texts when questions of competing identities, or hegemonic and counter-hegemonic identities and discourses, are at play. Finally, this thesis will posit that the significant cultural work of these texts is made manifest through the complex, problematization of essentialist, ethnocentric discourse and that, though previous critical attention has focused on the comic, satiric and sometimes polemic elements of these texts in relation to class, culture and ethnic identity, these texts enunciate more complex and ambivalent positions on identity than has generally been recognized. Though these texts critique essentialist and ethnocentric discourse, they do not, however, recommend a complete effacement of various formulations of cultural identity and they therefore occupy what can be considered a Third Space.
Chapter 1

The Third Space

In the Location of Culture, Homi K. Bhabha ambitiously sets out to explain how an ambivalent space serves as, among other things, the prime locus of culture. This is possibly his most salient, though often elusory, point throughout the text’s collection of essays. Bhabha claims early on in the text that “all cultural statements and systems are constructed in [a] contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation” and once we understand this “we begin to understand why hierarchal claims to the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable” (Bhabha 55). One of the reasons this purity of cultures is untenable is because of, as Bhabha suggests, and as will be further discussed below, the hybridity inherent in cultures and cultural enunciations. The “ambivalent space of enunciation” Bhabha also refers to is best (though sometimes elusively) described as the Third Space. It is a transitory space, as Ikas and Wagner address in their essay “Postcolonial Subjectivity and the Transclassical Logic of the Third Space”, because as “[a]nyone who has closely read Homi K. Bhabha’s works will know that there is no single, precise definition of the term third space to be found there” (Ikas and Wagner 96). This is, it can be argued, particularly due to the fact that examples of the Third Space in Bhabha’s oeuvre are highly contingent upon the particular contexts that are being invoked. The term can be used to discuss a Third Space of identity, culture and even a physical place, as is discussed by Edward Soja in his essay “Thirdspace: Toward a New Consciousness of Space and Spatiality”. In his essay, Soja follows Bhabha’s rhetoric where he discusses how his concept of a Thirdspace “serves both as a separable field, distinguishable from physical and mental space, also/and as an approximation for
an all-encompassing mode of spatial thinking [...] It is both a space that is
distinguishable from other spaces (physical and mental, or first and second) and a
transcending composite of all spaces” (Soja Communicating 52). Soja, who is
particularly influenced by Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*, likewise states how
“Bhabha’s Third Space comes close to [his] own conceptualization of Thirdspace⁸,
especially to what [he] call[s] critical thirding-as-Othering⁹” (60). Robert J. C. Young,
however, states in his essay “The Void of Misgiving,” that the Third Space is “not a place
because it is an instance of production in time – the moment of speech. The third space,
above all, is the site of enunciation” (Young 82).

It is this latter description of the Third Space that is most akin to its deployment
throughout my thesis. The enunciations that I will point to in the primary texts
throughout this chapter will demonstrate how the Third Space represents a hybrid,
ambivalent space that I believe is best described by Bhabha when he states that such a
space is “neither the One [...] nor the Other [...] but something else besides, which
contests the terms and territories of both” (Bhabha 41). I will first begin by discussing
Bhabha’s concepts of “cultural diversity” and “cultural difference”, for as Jonathan
Rutherford notes in his interview with Bhabha entitled ‘The Third Space’, these two
concepts are central to his notion of difference and hybridity and are fundamental to
understanding his notion of the Third Space (Rutherford 207). Then I will demonstrate
how these former two concepts, as well as other concepts of Bhabha’s such as
ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity can be used to explain the various tensions between
and within cultures and their associative, competing discourses within my selected works
of fiction. The particular discourses I will outline in this chapter frequently serve to
define and formulate concepts of cultural and ethnic identity as well as contributing to the
hierarchization of cultural identity and ethnocentricity. They are at times represented as
being created or perpetuated by institutions such as religion and government and appear
in various textual utterances and enunciative moments of the primary texts. Yet when the
‘terms and territories’ of these discourses are interrogated or contested via a character or
the narration’s enunciation of a Third Space of identity, this metaphorical ‘space’ is often
undermined and/or momentary.

**Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference vis-à-vis The Third Space**

One of Bhabha’s most intriguing arguments regarding cultural theory is presented
in his essay ‘Commitment to Theory’. In this essay, Bahbha presents the distinction
between what he has identified as “cultural diversity” and “cultural difference”. Bhabha
states that:

*Cultural diversity is an epistemological object – culture as an object of empirical
knowledge – whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture
as ‘knowledgeable’, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of
cultural identification. If cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics,
aesthetics or ethnology, cultural difference is a process of signification through
which statements *of* culture or *on* culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize
the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity (Bhabha 50)*

Anyone familiar with second language teaching can relate to Bhabha’s distinction
between the epistemological and processes of enunciation. When one teaches a second
language, one is constantly faced with the desire to translate words, rather than explain them in their linguistic contexts. This is a desire that is felt both by the teacher and the student as it is often the easiest way to convey the meaning of a word from one language to another. This one-to-one translation can be interpreted as commensurate with the notion of cultural diversity. Cultural diversity refers to a desire that used to be predominantly, almost exclusively, focused upon a binary logic but in the wake of postcolonial and much post-structuralist theory this is no longer the case. As Ashcroft et al. explain, cultural diversity “merely acknowledges a range of separate and distinct systems of behaviour, attitude and values,” and they warn, “such a framework may even continue to suggest that such differences are aberrant or exotic” (Ashcroft et al. 60).

Often what second language teachers realize is that it is more productive to resist simple translation and attempt to explain the word in the second language, in its respective context, especially given that some words are not capable of having their exact meaning translated into another language. Cultural difference, contrasted with cultural diversity, “suggests that cultural authority resides not in a series of fixed and determined diverse objects but in the process of how these objects come to be known and so come into being” (60). For Bhabha, cultural difference also demonstrates the hybridity of cultures, which further makes the commensurability between cultures difficult to achieve. If a culture is made up of different values, (hi)stories, etc. how can we explain its meaning by comparing it to another culture with different and sometimes contradictory or incompatible values, (hi)stories, etc? For Bhabha, hybridity is “not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges” rather, hybridity is “the third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories
that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives” (Rutherford 211). As will become evident in this chapter, the selected texts often dramatize this desire for a commensurability of cultures by propagating ethnocentricity and thereby undermining or contradicting the same texts enunciations and discourses that evidence a hybrid, Third Space.

Mordecai Richler’s The Street frequently portrays the difficulties of cultural difference in the ethno-linguistically diverse city of Montreal. Through its satirical, comic-realist stories, intercultural and intracultural tensions are ubiquitous, often serving as the principal loci of conflict throughout the narratives. One of the most interesting examples of intracultural difference appears in the first story, ‘The Street’. Here the narrator recounts a visit to his grandmother’s place after a two year stay in Europe that effectively portrays the matriarch’s influence and authority: “A Yiddish newspaper fluttering on her massive lap, black bootlaces unravelled, my grandmother was ensconced in a kitchen chair on the balcony, seemingly rooted there, attended by sons and daughters, fortified by grandchildren” (The Street 16). The grandmother then poignantly interrogates the narrator: “‘How is it for the Jews in Europe?’” whereupon the narrator feels “shorn from all my desperately acquired sophistication; my New Statesmen outlook, my shaky knowledge of wines and European capitals; the life I had made for myself beyond the ghetto.” The narrator then sullenly responds: “‘I don’t know’, I said, my shame mixed with resentment at being reclaimed so quickly. ‘I didn’t meet many’” (16). The narration then shifts to describe how the uncles are

[leaning against their shiny new cars, yawning on the balcony steps with hands thrust into their trousers pockets or munching watermelon, pinging seeds into}
saucers, [and how] my uncles reproached me for not having been to Israel. But their questions about Europe were less poignant than my grandmother’s. Had I seen the Folies Bergères? The changing of the guards? My uncles had become Canadians (16)

The specific imagery and grammar used to describe the family lends itself to an interesting interpretation. On the one hand, there is the grandmother with her massive lap, black bootlaces, rooted to the balcony, attended by sons and daughters, fortified by grandchildren, all of which connote the power and strength of the matriarch who interpellates her grandchild upon his return. She does not, like the uncles, ask about touristic places he may have visited, rather her tone and question reveals other concerns.

While on the other hand we have the uncles who are leaning against shiny new cars, yawning, hands thrust into trousers, munching watermelon, all of which can be interpreted as signs of their being carefree and dispassionate. Though they briefly reproach the narrator for not visiting Israel, they are apparently more interested in the trifle details of a music hall and a ceremonial ritual. The one referent represents France (the Folies Bergères), and the other, England (the changing of the guard), a dichotomy that equates the established, conventional, two founding peoples of the Canadian sense of identity, the one that the narrator claims the uncles have adopted.

The grandmother’s portrayal, as well as her question, contrasted with that of the narrator’s (and possibly that of the uncles’) speaks to Bhabha’s definition of the enunciative process that “introduces a split between the traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference, and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of cultural demands, meanings” (Bhabha 51).
In this excerpt the grandmother can be seen to represent the cultural diversity of an original, traditional culture in her representation of a ‘rooted’, rigid figure with ethnocentric concerns. This is contrasted with the narrator and uncles whose cultural identity is one of cultural difference that has become fluid, hybrid even, a hybridity whose “cultural meanings and identities always contain the traces of other meanings and identities” (Ashcroft et al. 61) This hybridity is further underlined by the narrator’s acknowledgment of his own split identity – “shorn from all my desperately acquired sophistication [...from] the life I had made for myself beyond the ghetto” (16) – the kind of splitting that Bhabha refers to as “a form of enunciatory, intellectual uncertainty and anxiety that stems from the fact that disavowal is not merely a principle of negation or elision” (Bhabha 188). This kind of enunciatory moment, Bhabha further suggests, is “both a defence against the anxiety of difference, and itself productive of differentiations” and congruent with tenets of cultural difference. Perhaps another way to understand the grandmother as an example of cultural diversity is in her implicit desire to compare the Jews in Europe to the Jews in Montreal. This tactic of commensurability is an archetypal method employed by those who have ethnocentric concerns or values. The depiction and critique of such ethnocentricity appears frequently in Richler’s fictional and non-fictional work, as is evidenced in his article “We Jews Are Almost as Bad as the Gentiles,” where he states: “It’s time to abandon the old, humiliating ghetto standard, ‘Is it good for the Jews?’” (Maclean’s 150). Yet these misgivings throughout his works do not promote a complete effacement of Jewish (or any minority’s) concerns. Rather, as will become evident throughout this thesis, his critique of identity politics is often equally matched by his critique of discrimination, bigotry and intolerance. This can be said to
demonstrate his anti-ethnocentric privileging of cultural difference; of his (and in the case above, his narrator’s) epistemological interrogation of traditional binaries.

Gérard Bessette is also effective at representing complex representations of ambivalence towards cultural identity. This is particularly the case with the character of Joyal in the novel Les pédagogues. One such example occurs when the teacher Joyal leaves the École pédagogique and encounters Lambert, subsequent to the teachers’ meeting where Joyal has recommended a foreign teacher, Chavinski, as a potential hire. Joyal suggests that they dine at a restaurant called the Golden Dragon, to which Lambert replies “Connais pas, mais je vous fais confiance. Il n'y a personne comme les touristes pour découvrir les coins intéressants” (Pédagogues 61). Joyal immediately replies: “Je ne suis pas un touriste. Le Canada, c'est mon pays” (61). Lambert takes a much more muted stance in declaring his affiliation to national identity: “Moi aussi. Il n'y a pas de quoi se vanter” (61). Finally, Joyal clarifies his position: “Je ne suis ni fier ni honteux d'être canadien. Je le suis, un point, c'est tout” (62). This back and forth between Joyal and Lambert establishes the beginning of their relationship, a relationship that is crucial to how the overall narrative develops. What is interesting is how this early exchange between the two is founded on formulations and self-representations of cultural identity, an issue that appears throughout the text and I would argue is a fundamental corollary to the structure and development of the narrative. Thus, it is while Joyal and Lambert are dining at the Golden Dragon restaurant that the reader is presented with an impressive example of cultural diversity, specifically in relation to its propensity to promote the exoticism of cultures. This occurs when a dancer “vêtue d’un kimono vert à broderies” enters the room dancing to oriental music. Lambert is entranced by the dancer until the
very end of the performance, when he frantically says to Joyal as his “mains se mirent en branle, ce fut avec frénésie […] ‘Elle est prodigieuse, phénoménale, mon cher!’” (71). Immediately after this, Lambert accompanies Joyal to the latter’s apartment where Joyal, the painter, reveals to Lambert his various works, including one of an oriental dancer, who clearly resembles the one in the Golden Dragon:

Décidément, le corps était réussi. Se détachant sur un fond de nuages effilochés, tourbillonnants, le bras droit tendu au-dessus de sa tête, la Siamoise s’élançait d’un bond irrésistible vers les hauteurs, vers l’inconnu […] Mais la figure de la danseuse clochait toujours. Elle était trop ‘humaine’, trop individuelle (75)

Lambert, as was the case earlier in the restaurant, is fascinated with the painting of the Oriental dancer: “Eh! bien, mon cher, dit Lambert, je ne vous ai rien dit de vos autres toiles parce que… parce qu’elles me déroutaient. Mais quant à celle-ci, pas de doute possible, elle est de première force” (75). Lambert’s response to both the painting and the real life dancer in the Golden Dragon, can be understood as a form of fantasized sexual subjection of Oriental women by Western men that Edward Said addresses in *Orientalism*. This “orientalism”, Said suggests, “stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled” (Said 6). This is a pattern, Said also claims, that implicitly promotes the sexualisation and feminization of the Orient by Western powers as a means of rationalizing and valorizing its colonization and subjugation. Said elucidates the West’s ability to reify the Orient as a signification of sex:

On the one hand, there was no such thing as “free” sex, and on the other, sex in society entailed a web of legal, moral, even political and economic obligations of a
detailed and certainly encumbering sort. Just as the various colonial possessions – quite apart from their economic benefit to metropolitan Europe – were useful as places to send wayward sons, superfluous populations of delinquents, poor people, and other undesirables, so the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe (190).

If the Orient served as a geographical locus for illicit sexual endeavours perpetuated by the West, it also served to inscribe a moral signification that made the conquest and subsequent possession of such a place morally righteous. This colonial possession was also qualified by how the West portrayed the Orient as a place known for its "eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indiﬀerence, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability" (206). The discourse of power and possession is also in keeping with the depiction of Lambert both on a personal level (his possession of his 'erotic' girlfriend Annabelle who was a prostitute, a character whose introduction into the narrative depicts her doing yoga, which in turn can be understood as a sign of the exotic, particularly in 1950's Quebec) and a professional level (his machinations in convincing Joyal, a key 'swing vote', to vote against the union). Thus, as will become more apparent, the textual enunciation of the painting in the narrative represents various aspects of subjectivity (regarding sexuality, gender, culture) as well as correlative discourses of power.

Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* is a very useful theoretical source in this regard. For she discusses the inter-connected subjectivities of race, gender and class, like Said before her, but especially how sexuality was used "as a trope for other power relations" and that they were "certainly an abiding aspect of imperial power"
(McClintock 14). Though McClintock critiques Said for his problematic way of “seeing
sexuality only as a metaphor [that] runs the risk of eliding gender as a constitutive
dynamic of imperial and anti-imperial power” and claims that “[Said] does not
systematically explore the dynamics of gender as a critical aspect of the imperial project”
(14), she does acknowledge her indebtedness to the former critic in her text.

McClintock’s contribution to imperial and post-colonial scholarship is important in
interrogating and subsequently contesting the heretofore binary logic of power relations
in favour of attention to multiple intersubjective positions of class, race, gender and
sexuality in post-colonial theory.

I would be remiss if I did not, at least briefly, discuss the role of gender in its
relation to the power relations interconnected with cultural identity discourse within some
of the texts. As discussed above in relation to Mordecai Richler’s story ‘The Street’, the
grandmother is portrayed as the matriarch par excellence who is portrayed as holding an
astonishing amount of power over all others in the family (similar to the Grandmother in
the story ‘The Summer My Grandmother Was Supposed to Die’ in The Street). She is
perhaps one of the most salient female characters throughout the selected texts by
Richler, particularly in her cultural enunciations (as demonstrated above) and in the way
they affect the principal character and the narrative. Similar to Richler’s grandmother, the
Oriental dancer’s depiction serves as a matrix of both gender and cultural textuality.

These two characters are textual examples of an intersection of identity discourses
(gender and cultural), as McClintock would claim, that demonstrates the complexity of
each subjectivity: “I do not see race, class, gender and sexuality as structurally equivalent
of each other […] Rather, these categories converge, merge and overdetermine each other
in intricate and often contradictory ways” (61). McClintock’s claim about the convergence of subjectivities can be read as similar to Bhabha’s invocation of the “apparatus of colonial power”: “Within the apparatus of colonial power, the discourses of sexuality and race relate in a process of functional overdetermination, ‘because each effect...enters into resonance or contradiction with the others and thereby calls for a readjustment or a reworking of the heterogeneous elements that surface at various points’” (Bhabha 106).

Thus, contrary to the discriminatory practices that would keep women submissive in many social situations, the narrator’s Grandmother can be understood as having some semblance of power, particularly in preserving culture through ethnocentric discourse. In Joyal’s painting, the inscrutable Oriental is presumed to have some kind of connection to the transcendent which, though implicit, can be said to be part of the Oriental figure’s erotic, sexually charged appeal, an appeal that leaves, at least Lambert, powerless to resist its seduction. One of the ways of understanding Lambert’s reaction to it can be primarily understood as an example of cultural diversity in the way it reinforces ethnocentric discourses, but the essentialized, romantic, portrayal of the Oriental female can also be said to implicitly deny that she is possibly more hybrid than her rather essentialist personification. Furthermore, Bessette’s depiction of this scene and particularly the scene at the gala discussed below, can be read as a satiric depiction of Orientalism and cultural diversity. Like Richler’s grandmother, the female dancer serves as cultural embodiment or sign of cultural diversity discourse. However, unlike the Grandmother, the Oriental female, that apparently Joyal is dating (though they never appear together throughout the narrative) is never given a speech act or discourse.
Subsequent to viewing Joyal’s oriental dancer painting, Lambert successfully insists that Joyal display it during the upcoming gala held by the minister of education. When word gets around to the attendees that Joyal is dating an oriental dancer and that she is the subject of one of his paintings, some of the guests are shocked and perturbed. One guest states: “Eh bien […] ça ne me surprend pas […] Avec un type comme lui on peut s’attendre aux pires excentricités. Vous avez vu sa barbe? A Paris, chez les artistes, il paraît que des horreurs semblables sont tout ce qu’il y a de plus courant (Pédagogues 134). Another guest assures the rest that the party organizer, Marie-Elisabeth Deschambault, “n’aurait pas risqué un scandale semblable” as it would compromise her husband’s, the Minister of Education, career. Faced with this information, another guest giddily claims: “l’exposition de ce soir sera plus amusante que je ne l’avais espéré” (135). Sarto Pellerin, who was initially silent while listening to the preceding dialogue, defends Joyal’s actions: “Sa vie privée lui appartient comme n’importe quel citoyen, non? Si c’est des saints qu’il vous faut, on n’a qu’à fermer les écoles” (135). One of the attendees, irritatingly replies:

[I]l faut bien reconnaître que la profession de pédagogue entraîne chez nous certaines obligations. Ce n’est pas tant une question de principe que…d’environnement si vous voulez […] Ils connaissent ou devraient connaître les exigences de la société qui les entoure. S’ils ne veulent pas s’y conformer, eh bien, ils n’ont qu’à se chercher un autre emploi (136)

Once the painting is unveiled, accompanied by Lambert’s piano playing, the majority of the crowd reacts differently. Initially while the gala’s other paintings are being exposed, Lambert plays music “presque complètement dénués de mélodie, ne réussissaient
pas à tenir l’auditoire en éveil” (149) so that the audience “tomb[ait] peu à peu dans la somnolence” (149). As an accompaniment for the painting unveiled before Joyal’s, an abstract expressionist painting, Lambert plays “une espèce de hoquet borborygmal, tantôt laborieux, tantôt tonitruant” at which point “[u]n déferlement de rire secoua l’auditoire […] Lambert venait de ridiculiser plus efficacement cette toile infecte que ne l’eussent fait des heures de discussion” (150).

Finally, for the unveiling of Joyal’s painting, Lambert plays a Beethoven sonata, to which the audience cheers, demonstrating their approval: “L’auditoire, un moment médusé, se déchaîna en bravos et en applaudissements” (150). Though Lambert has influenced the crowds’ reaction to the paintings, I believe another way to understand the fluctuation from the crowd’s expectation of scandal and humiliation to delight and arousal, can be found in Bhabha’s essay ‘The Other Question’. Here he discusses the stereotype, appropriating theories from both Edward Said and Sigmund Freud, claiming that the “fetish or stereotype gives access to an ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence” (Bhabha 107). This hybridity or Third Space is evident in the crowd’s vacillation from its initial anticipated reaction (anxiety and defence) against the exotic étrangère to its ending up being fascinated by and fetishizing the painting in ways that give the crowd pleasure. This scenario can also be related to Bhabha’s discussion of Said’s theory of “encapsulation or fixation which moves between the recognition of cultural and racial difference and its disavowal, by affixing the unfamiliar to something established, in a form of it that is repetitious and vacillates between delight and fear” (Bhabha 105). The encapsulation of different cultures and their disavowal demonstrates a compatibility with cultural diversity,
especially insofar, as cited above by Ashcroft et al., it assists in allowing other cultures to appear exotic and aberrant.

This encapsulation occurs in the way the painting "encapsulates" the exotic and the "aberrant" which is further contained by how Lambert accompanies it with classical, romantic music by Beethoven, a form that is conventionally seen as an expression of transcendence.\(^1\) What is also significant is that the crowd's delight is contrasted with their distaste and derision for the abstract expressionist painting. This binary between the abstract art and a fetishized portrait piece is, I believe, a synecdoche for the conflict between the conformist establishment and anti-establishment tendencies, and is analogous to other binaries throughout the novel such as union versus anti-union biases, and religious tolerance versus intolerance. Lambert's use of romantic, classical music can be said to assuage the anti-exotic, xenophobic guests which is also consistent with his conservative depiction throughout the text. The various political uses of art, particularly the use of abstract expressionist art as a synecdoche for anti-establishment discourse, is further enforced when one considers the socio-historic time of writing and recognizes the association with the famous abstract expressionist, "automatist" painter Paul-Émile Borduas, who was still quite active during the time *Les pédagogues* was written in the mid-to-late 50's. Borduas and the group of artists who were attached to *Le refus global* manifesto attempted to subvert the hegemonic powers in Quebec:

Avec la diffusion publique de *Refus global*, Borduas se mettra toutefois à dos non seulement les tenants de l'idéologie dominante, mais également les progressistes plus modérés qui refusent d'appuyer ses propositions anarchiques et anticléricales souhaitant plutôt une réorganisation des éléments en place (Vignault 139)
The socio-historic implications of abstract expressionist art as well as its anti-establishment corollary, I argue, is dramatized in this elaborate scene where Lambert mocks abstract expressionist art\textsuperscript{12} and inspires a similar reaction from the crowd\textsuperscript{13}. These various dialectics and their associative tensions are played out through the discourses of culture, gender and, to a certain extent, class. That Lambert is the ‘perpetuator’ and ‘purveyor’ of many of these discourses is significant in that he frames the narrative’s main conflict (the battle to start a union), which also allows the reader to appreciate how these discourses are enunciated through cultural, ethnic and gender discourses, thus encouraging the possibility of a deepened understanding of the text.

The above gala sequence from *Les pédagogues* implies Bessette is satirizing Lambert as well as the audience, whose characters can be read as embodiments of cultural diversity. It is also important to note, however, that Bessette satirizes the abstract painters in this scene as well. Just before the paintings are unveiled and Lambert plays his accompanying music, some of the artists, particularly the painter of the abstract expressionist art piece, Gérard Riel, are discussing some of their methods in creating their art:

[La voix de fausset de Gérard Riel, un jeune illuminé qui brossait ses tableaux à la lueur d’une chandelle, dans un studio aux fenêtres recouvertes de stores opaques. ‘Moi, vous comprenez, c’est l’inconscient qui m’intéresse. Il faut que je me place dans l’atmosphère la plus propice à la captation de ses messages’ – ‘L’obscurité complète serait préférable, naturellement?’ suggéra Vignault avec une sourire. – ‘J’ai essayé de peindre dans les ténèbres, répondit imperturbablement Riel, mais c’est assez difficile’ (Pédagogues 142)
The conversation continues in this satirical vein, when one of the painters interpellates Joyal and asks him his opinions on his art: “– Et vous, M. Joyal, que pensez-vous de ces théories? Bertrand [Joyal] haussa les épaules. – Rien. – Vous n’avez aucune théorie sur votre art? – Mettons que je n’en ai plus” (144). But as the painters press Joyal concerning his thoughts on how Lambert’s music accompaniment will be interpreted by the audience, Joyal responds:

Écoutez, moi, dit-il, j’aime beaucoup la musique. Lambert est un excellent pianiste. On ne peut pas nier qu’il y ait certaines correspondances entre les arts. L’impression que les toiles produiront sur lui ne sera peut-être pas exactement la nôtre, mais il y a des chances pour qu’on s’y retrouve. Moi, je suis de la veille école. Je pense que les hommes, tout les hommes ont quelque chose en commun. L’art est avant tout communication (144)

One of the artists, Paul Soulanges, claims “d’un ton méprisant” that Joyal is suggesting “l’artiste doit se ravaler au niveau de son public?”. Joyal responds angrily:

Mais, bon Dieu, que voulez-vous dire ‘au niveau de son public?’ Vous le connaissez, vous, votre public, avant de peindre une toile? […] Je pense qu’il faut essayer de se mettre dans la peau d’un public intelligent. Autrement, on s’enferme en soi-même et on ne produit que des rebus qui n’intéressent personne. – En somme, vous êtes en faveur de la peinture alimentaire? demanda Riel. Les autres ricanèrent (145)

The dialogue in this scene is important in that, as mentioned earlier, it demonstrates Bessette’s parallel, satirical treatment of the painters. Though this satirical depiction may not be as extensive as that of Lambert and the audience members, it demonstrates a
contrary, and thus an ambivalent, enunciation that interrogates the discourses of both
groups. By also satirizing Lambert and the audience it can be implied that Bessette is
taking a moral stance or making a value judgement, putting him on the side of the
abstract painters, yet it becomes obvious that this logic may be problematic, evidenced by
the above-cited scene. An analysis of the hierarchy of discourses, however, – i.e. of the
preponderance of discourse (direct and indirect) by Lambert and the conservative
audience, as well as their commensurability with that of the narration – can lead one to
conclude that Bessette leans more to exposing conservative characters negatively, than he
does the abstract painters. Moreover, this above scene is also significant in that it
demonstrates how Joya’s alienation from the abstract painters is, as will be discussed
below, equalled by his feelings of estrangement in relation to the other teachers at the
school. The fact that he feels both indifferent to the painters as well as the teachers, can
be interpreted as evidence of him occupying a Third Space.

**Hybridity, Language and Mimicry**

The utterances that represent cultural diversity, and especially ethnic-identified
discursive conflicts, are fundamental to the development of my selected corpus and
nowhere is that more evident than in Richler’s *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz.*
One of the most effective ways of demonstrating this is on the plane of language given
the ways it is used to portray the competing dynamics of cultural diversity and difference.
This is frequently connected to the enunciations of the various characters that serve to
signify their hybridity or their disavowal of it. One such example is evidenced early in
the novel when Duddy is working at a resort in Ste. Agathe for the summer and
encounters Irwin Shubert, the young Jewish McGill student whom continually refers to
Duddy as ‘David’, thus effacing the cultural or ethnic signification inherit in Duddy’s name. This also serves to signify Irwin’s assimilationist tendencies that become more apparent later in the novel (which I will discuss more in the next chapter).

Irwin’s desire to translate Duddy’s name represents how translation is the “performativa nature of cultural communication. It is language in actu (enunciation, positionality) rather than language in situ (énoncé, or propositionality) (Bhabha 326). In renaming Duddy, Irwin enunciates his own positionality, demonstrating his stock in cultural diversity by purposely translating and purposefully peeling away all cultural signification from Duddy’s name, which also disavows Duddy’s potential cultural hybridity. If Irwin’s enunciation attempts to undermine Duddy’s apparent hybridity, Duddy’s various enunciations enforce it. Striking instances of Duddy’s use of language occur with his use of Yiddish and German words. An analysis of the novel reveals that there are many unglossed words used, especially in Yiddish, throughout the novel and that they are frequently enunciated by Duddy. Frequently throughout the text Duddy uses the term ‘ver gerharget’ which is Yiddish for ‘get killed’.

Other Yiddish terms that he uses are ‘kaddish’ and ‘goy’, as well as the German word ‘prosit’. These utterances, particularly contrasted to Irwin’s constant effacement of his own cultural background, demonstrate Duddy’s amenability to diverse cultural enunciations. This, coupled with the fact that Duddy, alternatively, does not seek to antagonistically take up the position of Irwin’s opposite (a promoter of the Jewish faith and customs), or demonstrates any anti-assimilationism, allows Duddy to be understood as a character that perhaps is more ambivalent and open to cultural hybridity than many of the other characters in the novel. In addition to the unglossed words mentioned above
in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, there are also many unglossed words used in *The Street*. ‘Schwartzes’\(^{15}\), ‘eppes’, ‘pusherke’, ‘yentas’, ‘goniffs’ and ‘shabus’ are some of the Yiddish words that are found throughout the collection of stories; as will be discussed below, their usage can be read as creating a Third Space.

Appropriating words from other languages and presenting them in fiction is not terribly innovative, not even to literary theory, particularly postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theorists have already articulated one of its most important functions, referring to it as a ‘metonymic gap’\(^{16}\). A metonymic gap is a method of inserting unglossed words, phrases or passages from a first language, or a way of making allusions or references that are likely unknown to the reader. Bill Ashcroft *et al.* discuss this function, claiming that it “stands for the colonized culture in a metonymic way, and its very resistance to interpretation constructs a ‘gap’ between the writer’s culture and the colonial culture” (Ashcroft *et al.* 137). This explanation presupposes the writer is making a conscious, and perhaps even a socio-political decision by including such diction.

Furthermore, Ashcroft *et al.* suggest that a writer employs the metonymic gap to state: “‘I am using your language so that you will understand my world, but you will also know by the differences in the way I use it that you cannot share my experience’” (Ashcroft *et al.* 137). Claiming this is undoubtedly the case for a writer like Richler can be problematic in the sense that he does not necessarily represent a ‘colonized person’ in the sense that Ashcroft *et al.* discuss. But does Richler’s work not continually dramatize the cultural gap between minorities/refugees and dominant, native born and ‘naturalized citizens’ that often engenders conflict and struggle?
It is clear that the unglossed words in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* and *The Street* create a ‘gap’ if the reader does not understand the untranslated words, which I would argue is quite often the case, underscoring the possible differences between the distinct cultural communities of the reader and narrator. This difference gives the choice to the reader to find the meaning of the word, or to continue reading not knowing the definition of the word and thereby sometimes miss the ‘meaning’ of the enunciation, scene or narrative. Is there not an absence in meaning if one does not understand what a ‘Litvak’ is from Richler’s *The Street* in the story ‘Pinky’s Squealer’? Or what it means when Duddy angrily claims that his Uncle Benjy only sees him as a ‘pusherke’? I believe that inserting these words, whether intentionally or not, opens up the possibility for the reader to experience a momentary hybridity (whether they decode the words or not) based upon the language of another ethnicity and/or culture. However, idealism aside, one cannot deny that it is possible that this may not generate a positive experience and can perhaps reinforce prejudices.

It must be acknowledged that another way of understanding the appropriation of various words from different languages, particularly in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, is that it also satirizes the pseudo-cosmopolitan character of Duddy as he performs a type of posturing and positionality comparable to the depiction of Lambert in *Les pédagogues*. For instance, there is the scene when Lambert uses English and Italian words when dining with Joyal, at The Golden Dragon restaurant: “*Elementary, mon cher!*”, “*C’est très simple. Primo, if faut preuve de soumission [...] Secundo, il donne une petit leçon d’humilité à Sarto*” (Pédagogues 63). Lambert’s multi-lingual enunciations can be understood in relation to how Joyal has recently returned from living in Europe
since it would appear that Lambert is attempting to match Joyal’s perceived
cosmopolitanism. Lambert’s performativity\textsuperscript{20} demonstrates the discourse of cultural
fetishization typical of a bourgeois dilettante and one that is consistent with notions of
cultural diversity, in the way his, to paraphrase Ashcroft \textit{et al.}'s account of cultural
diversity, exoticization of a foreign language contradicts the habitation or occupation of a
Third Space. Though I do believe Duddy’s use of words like ‘Cheerio’ and ‘Prosit’ can
also be interpreted satirically, the instances in which Yiddish is not translated can also be
read as a way of retaining the cultural specificity and significance of the utterance, as per
my above point about allowing the reader the opportunity to hybridize his/her cultural
understanding. Either way, such examples are fundamental to understanding the
constitution of the characters within the various texts, underlining the cultural and
political significance of foreign words within dialogue that is presented throughout the
narrative.

Other kinds of appropriations of enunciative signifiers occur within \textit{The
Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz} when Duddy begins to greet people with “Cheerio” in
the same way Mr. Friar does. This usage can be read as symbolic of the British/Canadian
colonizer/colonized relationship, given that Mr. Friar is British and to a certain extent
holds power over Duddy in his ability to direct the documentaries. Though it can be
argued that the constantly drunk Friar is under Duddy’s constant guardianship, their
complex relationship can be further read as symbolic of the complex,
colonized/colonizer, master-slave dialectic interrogated by Bhabha: “there is no
recognition of master and slave, there is only the enslaved master, the unmastered slave”
(Bhabha 181) which further demonstrates an ambivalence that can paradoxically be “both
exploitative and nurturing” (Ashcroft et al. 13). When it becomes clear that Duddy is successful and can get on without him, Friar as well as Duddy’s use of “cheerio” are conspicuously absent.

This mimicry that Duddy enunciates bears a striking resemblance to the mimicry that Bhabha claims is often present in relations between colonizer and colonized and often undermines the former’s authority: “The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha 126). Bhabha’s claim of disruption is rooted in the belief that mimicry, as Ashcroft et al. explain, can undermine colonial discourse: “The problem for colonial discourse is that it wants to produce compliant subjects who reproduce its assumptions, habits and values – that is, ‘mimic’ the colonizer. But instead it produces ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never far from mockery” (Ashcroft et al. 13).

Such mimicry and how it complicates the representation of power relations vis-à-vis Anglo-British identified hegemony in Montreal in the 1950s, is also demonstrated within the text in the scene where Duddy and the Cadet Corps march into the Jewish neighbourhood. While the cadets are saluting the Union Jack, they are mocked and ridiculed by the neighbourhood onlookers: “Hey, look out there General Montgomery, here comes your mother to blow your nose” (Apprenticeship 36). “Hey, Sir! Mr. James! You know what you can do with that stick?” (38), “Boxenbaum. Hey! You’ll get a rupture if you carry that drum any further” (38). Similar lampooning and disparagement of British-Canadian identified signs and referents occurs in the text when Duddy and the rest of the students graduate from Fletcher’s Field High School. For the graduation ceremony, the school has invited Captain John Edgar Tate “author of Canada - Land of
Contrasts [...] and proud descendant of a family of United Empire Loyalists" to give a speech. During the Captain’s uninspiring oration the parents of the Saint Urbain graduates begin to get restless: “You see that red nose he’s got? That comes from too much Johnny Walker”, “Louder. LOUDER, PLEASE”. “Why couldn’t they have invited one of our own to speak?” (Apprenticeship 62). These comical portrayals demonstrate a satire of both the mocking, Jewish audience as well as of traditionalist, proud, British-Canadian discourse and its representatives that neither places the narrator as favouring the one, nor the other, but something else besides that can be defined as a textual Third Space which critiques, contests and challenges both discourses.

Enunciative moments that denote and yet also challenge cultural identity are also ubiquitous in Gérard Bessette’s La bagarre and have been much examined by critics such as Réjean Robidoux and André Belleau. In Le romancier fictif, Belleau analyses La bagarre and the moments of “l’hétérogénéité linguistique” that appear within it. His analysis leads him to conclude that La bagarre’s: “univers fictif se trouve muni des données indispensables à sa sociolinguistique” (Belleau 122). These various sociolinguistic dialects, particularly joual, can be said to function similarly to how the ‘metonymic gap’ does in Richler’s works. As Winfried Siemerling notes in The New North American Studies, joual, like the metonymic gap, signifies a post-colonial identified strategy: “In the case of ‘joual’ as simulated orality on paper and ‘autonomous’ literary device, this process [...] undercuts international French as dominant standard held up to the colonial subject” (Siemerling 128). Belleau, however, articulates how the social heterogeneity of the characters is realistically dramatized through their various linguistic differences, differences that denote a variety of ethnic and class spectrums in
Montreal. According to Belleau, in opposition to contemporary authors such as Jacques Ferron, who employs a language “relativement homogène,” and André Langevin, who provides characters where “absolument rien ne distingue la forme de leurs langages” (Belleau 120), Bessette creates a heterogeneous universe on the linguistic level. Belleau adds that “notre narrateur pousse la neutralité beaucoup plus loin qu’il n’y paraît puisque son propre langage est contaminé par les énonciations particulières des personnages” (122). This strategy and rejection of a homogenous, universalist depiction, at least on the socio-linguistic level, is analogous to one of Bhabha’s remarks regarding a universalist framework: “The difference of cultures cannot be something that can be accommodated within a universalist framework. Different cultures, the difference between cultural practices, the difference in the construction of cultures within different groups, very often set up and amongst themselves an incommensurability” (Rutherford 209). Whether it’s Bill’s, the tramway worker’s, working-class identified joual or Weston’s French that is peppered with English words, almost all of the characters of La bagarre use a distinctive socio-linguistic dialect that not only signifies class and/or cultural differences that make the novel so engaging and effective, but they also contribute significantly to the representations and enunciations of the tensions and conflicts of the narrative.

The one character who appears to communicate and move freely between each sociolinguistic group throughout La bagarre is Jules Lebeuf. Lebeuf can communicate within disparate discourses, such as his co-workers’ joual or the intellectual debates he has with Augustin Sillery and Ken Weston. Yet André Belleau does not see the heterogeneous sociolects that surround Lebeuf as a positive influence: “Chez Rabelais, Joyce, Aquin, l’hétérogénéité discursive ne paraît pas grevée d’un signe négatif, bien au
contraire, tandis que dans *La bagarre*, la multitude des énonciations s’accompagne de l’impuissance du héros à s’exprimer" (Belleau 123). Belleau associates the sociolects of each character with discursive cultural enunciations that make it difficult for Lebeuf to remain completely ambivalent as he is eventually pulled towards and integrated into competing forms of discourse and momentarily constructed by their associative codes or values. Of the various discourses that Lebeuf engages in and moves between (academia, worker, supervisor, writer) he eventually is most powerfully interpellated by that of being a supervisor and loses his ambivalence. Ironically his fellow coworkers, whom he has attempted to help by accepting the job as supervisor, no longer speak with him. He abandons University and is rarely in contact with his former friends: “Depuis lors, Jules n’avait pas reçu des ses [Sillery] nouvelles. Même cette compagnie lui était refusée…Après son échec en philosophie, Lebeuf n’était pas retourné à l’université” (La bagarre 323). His dream of writing a novel also evaporates: “Que devenaient dans tout ça ses rêves littéraires, son vague désir d’aider ses compatriotes, de réveiller l’âme montréalaise?...Bien qu’il eût du temps libre durant la journée, Jules n’avait pas retouché à son roman” (327).

Belleau believes that Lebeuf’s attempts to move between these discourses also undermine his ability at representing the French Canadian people in his potential novel. For as Belleau points out “puisque Lebeuf n’arrive pas à écrire le roman qui va enfin exprimer ce que ‘nous’ sommes, se pourrait-il que l’incapacité dont il s’agit réside non pas en lui mais dans ce ‘nous’ *en situation de langage* que cherche à représenter le texte” (Belleau 123). Belleau’s point is that though the socio-linguistic realism of Bessette’s text is effective in its depiction of heterogeneous characters that are true to life, it
paradoxically makes it impossible for Lebeuf (and perhaps, Bessette?) to signify who the French Canadian people are. This is a very interesting claim in that it appears to criticize Bessette’s reliance on the realistic depiction of heterogeneity, an aspect that I believe is endemic to the representation and valorization of cultural difference. Belleau’s implicit point that heterogeneity is inherently counter to an essentialized unitary image of identity and undermines a French Canadian one is, at least in my opinion, quite accurate. However, Belleau’s criticism of the text can be read as an overdetermined socio-politically driven one that faults the text for its ambivalences in depicting Montreal as a heterogeneous universe of Third Spaces rather than as one that consists of a unified, homogenous, ethno-linguistic identity.

Class distinctions

The idea that the socio-linguistic heterogeneity of the characters around Lebeuf render him incapable of expressing who the French Canadian people are collectively is also relevant on a class level that is interconnected with questions of cultural identity. In *Histoire du Québec Contemporain Tome II: Le québec depuis 1930*, André Linteau draws attention to the class disparities between French and English Canadians during the decades immediately after WW II, highlighting how: “Au Québec, [la] grande bourgeoisie, très massivement anglophone, se concentre presque entièrement à Montréal” (Linteau 294). Linteau further mentions a study done in 1955 by the sociologist John Porter that demonstrates les caractéristiques de l’élite économique du Canada pour les années 1948-1950. Il relève la présence de 985 individus qui occupent un poste d’administrateur dans
Porter and Linteau's observations about English Canadian dominance in positions of power are fictionalized in Bessette's *La bagarre* through the character of Stevens, the tramway workers' supervisor who is believed to be a unilingual Anglophone (though he can also effectively communicate in French). In *Social Realism in the French-Canadian Novel*, Ben-Zion Shek relates the character of Stevens as contributing to the theme of "cultural alienation" (Shek 232) in the novel. Shek ascribes an alienation felt by the workers to Stevens, specifically in relation to the workers' reluctance to attend a meeting with him because of their difficulty communicating in the English language. Shek claims that "not only is Stevens, a former sweeper, head of all the manual workers of the transportation company, but one of his two assistants is also English-speaking" (232). To confirm this alienation, Shek quotes one of the workers of *La bagarre*: "'J'sais pas l'anglais, moé, les boys, vous l'savez.' 'Lebeuf peut traduire'" (La bagarre p182). But Stevens *can* communicate in French, as is evidenced when one worker remarks "Pis Stevens, il sait le français", information that appears immediately after the quotation used by Shek. For some reason, Shek does not include this citation in the passage appropriated for his argument. Shek's erasure of said observation by the character mirrors the other workers' reification of Stevens as a unilingual boss incapable of speaking French, a falsehood that facilitates the workers' resentment towards him as well as Shek's argument about the absoluteness of ethno-linguistic 'cultural alienation' within the text. It is an argument that, I believe, is informed and predicated upon the historical facts
mentioned above by Linteau, yet does not seem to be substantiated by the more complex identity issues that Shek appears to ignore in the text. These noted oversights beg the question: Is it possible that feelings of alienation go both ways?

As *La bagarre* dramatizes, Stevens was once amicable with the workers, but after his promotion and his recourse to his newly appointed assistants, he rarely socializes with the workers. But is this exclusively a result of Stevens’ assumed superior view of himself, or because the workers insist upon ostracizing him? For as the narrator claims: “Mais, chef et assistants, on les enveloppait tous dans la même méfiance, la même hostilité sourde et tenace” (178). One gets the impression, based on this passage, that the workers treat all the managers with disdain, regardless of what language they speak, which is also subsequently evidenced in their reaction to Lebeuf at the end of the novel. Ironically, he will also eventually be alienated from the former co-workers he tried to defend when they do not allow him to maintain an ambivalent identity as both a friend and supervisor. He becomes in the eyes of his former coworkers simply a supervisor and is treated with all the excessive circumspection that can entail. What I hope I have made apparent is how *La bagarre* dramatizes the facileness and potential destructiveness of attempting to contain someone through recourse to oversimplified class and ethno-linguistic categories and their consequent ostracism rather than accepting someone’s in-between identity, whether it be their ability to communicate in both French and English, or their dual identity as a co-worker and supervisor. This can be understood, in a sense, by Bhabha’s explanation of how cultural diversity works/functions/operates and interpellates: “[a] transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that ‘these cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate
them in our own grid” (Rutherford 208). The containment of cultures (or more generally, identity) in a grid, is synonymous with understanding the containment of Stevens as a unilingual boss (both fictionally and critically by Shek) or Lebeuf as a supervisor. This is a textual demonstration of how the same basic strategy can be employed socially to contain or reject both class and cultural differences, which would therefore be synonymous with the concept of cultural diversity in that it contains and reifies a form of identity.

Classed identities and the ways that Lebeuf moves between them are demonstrated by how he is characterized as ‘working class’, and is therefore outside of his element in the academy, and has serious trouble reconciling the two. Or, alternatively, as a would-be writer who attempts to identify himself fully as a member of the working classes but is not completely accepted as such. This is evidenced by one of the worker’s claims that: “Tu fais ton ouvrage, c’est ben correct […] Mais n’empêche que c’est pas la même chose. T’es comme qui dirait un touriste, toué, ici!” (La bagarre 69). Similar alienation or disparateness vis-à-vis fellow coworkers is depicted in Les pédagogues when Joyal, upon leaving a teacher’s meeting early in the novel, states: “‘Je n’ai pas encore assez d’expérience pour me prononcer’. Il se souvient qu’à son arrivée à Montmartre les ‘palabres’ des peintres ne lui semblaient rimer à rien non plus. ‘Pourtant je m’y suis habitué’. C’était une question de vocabulaire, de convention’” (Pédagogues 61). Joyal’s comparison of the enunciative acts performed by the teachers during the meeting to those of French painters is interesting particularly when one considers his ulterior comment indicating that both discourses are products of ‘conventions’, or of what I would characterize as ‘performativity’. However, Joyal’s acknowledgement of this
performativity is quite unlike Lebeuf, for he never acknowledges his performativity nor uses the working-class-identified *joual* that his coworkers enunciate. This class-based performativity is not, as will be discussed below, necessarily mutually exclusive from cultural identity and any attempt at reconciling these conflicted, identities hinders the habitation of a Third Space.

One of the best examples of the interconnectedness between class and culture is evident in Margo’s reiteration of Lebeuf’s critiques of French Canadians:

‘Les Canadiens parlent mal: les Canadiens écoutent des programmes idiots; les Canadiens font ci, les Canadiens font ça! Ils font jamais rien de ben, les Canadiens, à ton dire!’ […] ‘Pis, à part de ça, t’en pas ein, toi, ein Canadien, comme tout le monde? T’en est pas ein, toi? Tu te crois plus fin que les autres parce que tu vas à l’université, mais si t’es fin que ça pourquoi tu décrotes des petits chars, d’abord? (La bagarre 37)

In the above passage, Margo equates Lebeuf’s university career and the associated intellectual lifestyle with the rejection of a “Canadien” identity. This is yet another socio-linguistic discursive enunciation, as addressed by Belleau, and positions Margo as a character who sees identities in commensurable binaries, whereby a person is either one or its comparable other rather than “à cheval sur la clôture” (38), as she lucidly claims. Her belief that someone cannot inhabit in-between identities is proven to be true in the end, as Lebeuf is incapable of fully remaining ambivalent and balancing his in-between identity. This failure at the end of the novel is addressed by Ben Zion Shek’s claim that the novel’s dark mood “end[s] with a moral surrender or compromise” (Shek 234). The struggle between two analogous social positions, their associated discursive elements,
and the resultant decision is similarly dramatized in Bessette’s *Les pédagogues*, where Sarto Pellerin, the main character, is caught between choosing to join a labour union or remain as a non-unionized, exploited teacher. Though Pellerin’s decision at the end of the text does not exhibit the ‘dark mood’ associated with the conclusion of *La bagarre*, both texts underline the social and discursive circumstances that make it difficult for one to inhabit an in-between, hybrid formation of identity.

**The Role of Religion**

The selected primary texts frequently critique how religion in Quebec was once one of the most pervasive cultural institutions that was concerned with preserving tradition, and thereby ethno-linguistic identity, through dogma. This is particularly evident in Gérard Bessette’s works, especially *Les pédagogues*. A moment that is indicative of the power of the Catholic Church is presented when Lambert, trying to sway Joyal to vote against joining a union, explains who holds power in Quebec: “Il y a deux puissances ici qui mènent tout: les politiciens et les clergés” (*Les pédagogues* 209). Though Lambert’s remark can be read as a reductive and simplistic comment (it can be argued that British, Canadian and especially American capital held and exercised an inordinate amount of power during this time), he accurately notes how politics and religion collude to create and enforce the dominant ideology in Quebec for francophones. This was evident in Maurice Duplessis’ reign as Premier of Quebec, which is commonly known as *La grande noirceur*. During Duplessis’ time as the premier and leader of the Union Nationale the role of religion, to him, was necessary to society’s development:
Présentée sous la forme d'un discours autoritaire, dogmatique et simplificateur, l'idéologie de Duplessis se résume à quelques thèses. À la base, il y a des principes éternels et immuables d'ordre et de stabilité dictés par la divine Providence qui fixe à chacun sa place dans la société. Dès lors, une hiérarchie sociale est nécessaire et la lutte des classées ne saurait exister dans une société chrétienne où chacun travaille dans la sphère où l'a placé la volonté de Dieu (Monière 307)

Given that *Les pédagogues* was written during the late 1950's when Duplessis' Union Nationale party and the power of the church was still predominant, *Les pédagogues* provides an accurate portrayal of this aspect of this historic moment in Quebec, underscoring the role of religion in the school system. As is well documented, the church was highly influential in the school system, and for Duplessis a Catholic education was paramount to the citizens of Quebec, as he stated in *Le Devoir* on August 26, 1946:

“Aucun système d’éducation peut être bon sans religion [....] Soyons donc heureux que notre enseignement soit demeuré sur une base religieuse dans notre province” (Monière 37)

Duplessis’ adamant belief in religious instruction, coupled with the role of the Church in the administration of the school system, made it difficult for people of other faiths and particularly agnostics to be accepted as teachers or administrators within the Catholic educational system.

A pertinent fictional dramatization of this occurs in *Les pédagogues* when Chavinski, a polish immigrant supply teacher, is proposed for a new full-time position at the school board. After Joyal casually mentions Chavinski, who had recently quit from his position as a supply teacher, l'abbé Béchard claims that “s’il n’avait pas donné sa démission, on l’aurait tout de même remercié de ses services” (Pédagogues 57). When
Joyal asks why that would have been the case, Béchard responds “Il ne pratique pas de religion”. Though Joyal questions how anyone could know this for certain, Béchard’s only definitive answer is: “[c]e sont des élèves qui auraient remarqué son absence à la messe le dimanche” (57). The fact that Chavinski is not a righteous churchgoing Catholic, and that his religious beliefs are unknown or ambiguous, creates concerns for the clergy-run school board. This anxiety can be said to echo Bhabha’s account of how the Third Space is comprised of “neither the One [...] nor the Other [...] but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both” (Bhabha 41). Chavinski personifies neither the one nor the other, neither Catholicism nor secularism, and by fulfilling or occupying this ambiguous Third Space he creates anxiety for and rejection by the staunch religious administrators responsible for his hiring.

The above scene in Les pédagogues is effective in highlighting the institutionalized, essentialist ideology of the church in Quebec during the time of the novel’s setting. Claude Racine also speaks to this in his historical text L’anticléricalisme dans le roman québécois (1940-1965) when, in referring to Les pédagogues, he echoes Lambert’s aforenoted comments regarding the dual power in Quebec: “Les griefs majeurs qui ressortent de ce roman contre le milieu enseignant peuvent se ramener à deux: influence politique indue, primauté accordée aux croyances religieuses au détriment de la compétence professionnelle” (Racine 52). Racine further discusses how Sarto Pellerin exhibits “rancœur contre ce qu’il appelle une ‘mentalité sacristain’ and later claims that both he and Jules Lebeuf from La bagarre are Bessette’s “personnage[s] préféré[s]” (Racine 53). One way of understanding Racine’s claim that Lebeuf and Pellerin are Bessette’s favourite characters is that they share Bessette’s critique of and wariness
towards the role of religion in Quebec. However, this critique is put into question by Ben-Zion Shek in *Social Realism in the French-Canadian Novel*, where he claims that Bessette’s depiction of a supposed agnostic not gaining a teaching position is detrimental for the novel in that “the autobiographical nature of an incident evokes the author’s irony or rancour in isolation from the characters” (Shek 235). The ‘autobiographical incident’ Shek is likely and abstractly referring to is Bessette’s own inability to get an academic post in Quebec during the 1950’s because of his agnosticism, and how it likely fuelled his critique in *Les pédagogues* of the heavily clerical controlled school system of the day; a stance I would argue is also present in *La bagarre* but in a less detailed way.

Reading Shek’s citation one gets the impression that Bessette partakes in authorial intrusion or polemics and that this compromises the development and credibility of the characters. However, one could contend, as I believe the previous noted passages demonstrate, that Bessette’s depictions of socio-historical power relations are perfectly congruent with and important to the representation of the socio-historical moment by establishing a realist narrative that contests the essentialist discourse produced by rigid cultural institutions. This contestation of essentialist discourse functions as a refutation of what Bhabha calls a “prior given or originary culture” while demonstrating that “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity”. But as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, hybridity according to Bhabha is “not [evident when we are] able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges”; rather, it is the “third space [that] displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives” (Rutherford 211). By discussing and including *Les pédagogues* as an anticlerical text the way Racine does, *part* of its cultural work is that it,
like many other texts at the time, contested hegemonic essentialist ideologies and “set up new structures of authority, new political initiatives”. This qualification, especially when applied to some of the representations of its characters, can also be considered as a textual example of a Third Space while demonstrating that figures like the Oriental woman, Chiavinski and Lebeuf are continually part of or in a process of hybridity.

However, a danger of Racine’s claim that anticlericalism is the definitive cultural work of the text, and not part of its cultural work, is that it perpetuates a reductive example of the binary opposition between religious and anti-religious discourse.

Racine’s above comparison of Pellerin to Lebeuf is emphasized by their mutual belief that the role of the church is detrimental to French Canadians’ social mobility. But their recognition that the church is holding their society back is also addressed by their comparisons of French-Canadian to English Canadian education. This is evident in Les pédagogues when Pellerin notices how English-Canadian students are not constrained by similar restrictions and are more knowledgeable about the former’s literature: “[L]es étudiants canadiens-français, sauf quelques ‘mauvaises têtes’ qui violaient la consigne, se trouvait beaucoup moins bien renseignés sur la littérature française que les étudiants canadiens anglais” (Pédagogues 112). In La bagarre, Lebeuf also valorizes English Canadians’ methods of instruction, as is evidenced by his recommendation that Gisèle follow their example in the way they “travaillent à temps partiel tout en prenant des cours” (La bagarre 131). Bill, Gisèle’s father, meets this recommendation with hesitation, especially when Lebeuf suggests that Gisèle should enroll in an English school:

‘J’vas t’dire, moué, e’L’beuf, l’instruction, j’suis pour cent pour cent. Seulement, l’école l’anglaise, c’est une autre paire de manches, tu comprends’ [...] Jules fut
tenté d’expliquer au balayeuse que le programmes d’études de Sir George Williams où Gisèle pourrait dès le début se spécialiser en mathématiques lui serait plus profitable qu’un cours à base de latin et de dissertations pour lesquels elle ne manifestait aucune aptitude. Mais Bill n’y comprenait rien (287)

In *Histoire du Québec Contemporain Tome II: Le Québec depuis 1930*, André Linteau discusses the lack of math and science based courses within the Quebec school system and emphasizes the stifling omnipresence of the clergy in the classroom:

> Pendant huit ans, les élèves y reçoivent une formation appuyée essentiellement sur les humanités, la philosophie et la religion et laissant peu de place aux sciences ou aux questions pratiques. Étant internes, c’est-à-dire pensionnaires, ils passent donc la plus grande partie de leur vie d’adolescents à l’intérieur du collèges, solidement encadrés par des prêtres (Linteau 302)

Accordingly, Lebeuf’s denigration of the established education system, coupled with his claim that Gisèle represents “[u]n autre talent de perdu, comme tant d’autres” (La bagarre 322) is, I believe, another dramatized critique of the education system and by extension of the clergy that heavily influenced it. Lebeuf’s circumspection towards the institution is further validated when Bill, rather than give his daughter the opportunity he claims she needs, decides to have his daughter educated in a convent. Despite Bill’s boasting to his wife earlier in the novel regarding Lebeuf’s intelligent comments: “Hein? C’est pas ton curé qui pourrait en sortir autant” (La bagarre 123), his anxiety around the possibility of enrolling Gisèle in an English school system forces him to defer to the dominant power of the church. The textual work of dramatizing Lebeuf and Pellerin’s attitude towards the English school system, can be associated with Ashcroft *et al’s* conception of
‘ambivalence’ as discussed in *Post-Colonial Studies: Key Concepts* where they claim that “ambivalence also characterizes the way in which colonial discourse relates to the colonized subject, for it may be both exploitative and nurturing” (Ashcroft *et al*. 13). If we are to consider the French Canadians as colonized, or at the very least, under the dominant hegemony of both the Church and English Canadian Capital and ideology, it becomes evident that these characters are textual enunciations of such ambivalence in that, in order to progress as a group of people, Lebeuf and Pellerin recognize that French-Canadians could benefit from adapting to or appropriating the teaching methods of their ethno-linguistically dominant ‘Other’.

Richler, like Bessette, is very adept at representing the role of religion in the Jewish community and how it affects both collective and individual identity and culture. In the case of *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, the burden of religious metaphor plays a subtle yet significant force in the narrative. This is most evident when Simcha, Duddy’s grandfather, emblematically echoes the Jewish dream of a promised land when he states: “A man without land is nobody. Remember that, Duddel” (*Apprenticeship* 44). Simcha’s admonition becomes an obsession for Duddy throughout the narrative. In the article “Sociology, Psychology and Satire in the Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz”, John Ower speaks to the “conditioning” role of Jewish culture on the characters: “Duddy and the other Jewish characters in *The Apprenticeship* are conditioned not only by their surroundings but also by the ethnic culture that they have inherited from a long and checkered history” (Ower 420). Ower speaks to some of the major themes of the novel such as the “paradoxical offensive-defensive syndrome” and the “ghetto mentality”
created by the fear of both their adopted country as well as the pogroms of Eastern
Europe and Nazi Germany many had fled.

More specifically, Ower points to religion's role in the need to claim one's own
land when he states: "The same mentality that leads Jews to stake out a "turf" is displayed
in the rigid adherence of the older generation to their religion and to the customs
imported from eastern Europe" (Ower 420), as is evidenced by Simcha's above noted
statement to Duddy. This kind of adherence by the older generation to dogmatic customs
is consistent with Bhabha's point that proponents of cultural diversity perpetuate the
"traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community" (Bhabha 51).
However, Duddy does not fully appear to follow the precepts of cultural diversity; his
fidelity to ethnic and cultural traditions appears to be replaced by, or is subordinate to, his
opportunistic relations with his friends. It can be argued that throughout the text, Duddy
thinks of himself and his actions as more "modern" and secular than those of his uncle
Benjy and his grandfather, Simcha. This is evidenced by his relationship to Yvette,
whom he refers to as nothing more than a "Girl Friday", his relationship with Mr. Calder,
and the parties he holds in his apartment where he regularly invites Hersh and other
pseudo-intellectuals.

Both Yvette and the apartment are not viewed favourably by Duddy's father,
Max. Duddy's father may be a part-time pimp, but that doesn't prevent him from
exclaiming that Duddy's "got his own apartment now and a shiksa to go with. You dirty
pig!" (Apprenticeship 218). Duddy's unorthodox (from a traditional Jewish perspective)
relationship to Yvette is reiterated near the end of the novel. This occurs when Duddy
attempts to explain his actions to his grandfather, who is sickened by the way Duddy
acquired his land. Duddy angrily questions his grandfather: “Would you have rather I married a shiksa, Zeyda?” To which Simcha responds: “Don’t twist. Not with me” (324). Duddy then reveals his anger and confusion: “You don’t twist either. You don’t want a farm. You never have. You’re scared stiff of the country and you want to die in that stinky old shoe repair shop […] A man without land is nothing. That’s what you always told me. Well, I’m somebody. A real somebody” (325). Duddy’s enunciation demonstrates not only his moral and cultural confusion about the discourses he was raised on, but its hypocrisy and contradiction. Duddy’s actions in many ways can be understood as a result of confusion in being caught within an ambivalent, Third Space between various contradictory discourses. This is particularly significant when one considers Bhabha’s claim of how minority discourse inherently perpetuates in-betweeness:

Minority discourse sets the act of emergence in the antagonistic in-between of image and sign, the accumulative and the adjunct, presence and proxy. It contests genealogies of ‘origin’ that lead to claims for cultural supremacy and historical priority. Minority discourse acknowledges the status of national culture – and the people – as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life (Bhabha 225)

Duddy is pulled back and forth by both the performative, Jewish-identified discourse’s many enunciations (acquire land, don’t marry a shiksa), as well as the equally contentious, more modern, secular discourses as alluded to above. Another identitary discourse that is used to try to re/claim Duddy occurs towards the end of the novel when
Duddy’s relationship with Virgil is put into question by Mr Cohen’s xenophobic, ethnocentric identified discourse:

If I thought he’d be good for half a cent more a ton I’d squeeze it out of him. 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 [...] or throw you into a furnace like six million others [...] ‘Jeez,’ Duddy said. ‘Wait a minute. Virgie is No Nazi’ [...] ‘They’re all Nazis. You scrape down deep enough and you’ll see’ (272)

Duddy appears to pay no heed to Cohen’s claim, until he performs the final violence to Virgil; robbing him of his money. Though it is problematic to claim that Duddy’s motives for stealing from Virgil are entirely inspired by Cohen’s argument, I would argue that the enunciative acts underscoring the differences between gentiles and Jews that are ubiquitous throughout the narrative makes it easier for Duddy to legitimize his actions. During the time of Cohen’s speech Duddy is, unbeknownst to him, dealing with a nervous breakdown which can be read as symbolizing the moral confusion of being in-between several contradictory and essentializing discourses. At the height of his illness, Yvette invites Duddy to stay with her and Virgil in a house she has rented, not far from the land he has attempted to acquire near Ste. Agathe. He subsequently emerges out of his illness regaining his strength and staying with them. This respite is only brief, however, as he receives a letter from his Uncle Benjy that refuels his obsession to purchase the land surrounding the lake:
You’re two people [...] The scheming little bastard I saw so easily and the fine, intelligent boy underneath that your grandfather, bless him, saw. But you’re coming of age soon and you’ll have to choose. A boy can be two, three, four potential people, but a man is only one. He murders the others (287)

This citation cogently articulates the sense of being in-between discourses and being pressured to choose one. In a sense it can be simply read as symbolizing the conflicted nature of the movement from innocence to maturity inherent in a bildungsroman. However, I believe, it is also emblematic of, as Belsey, Hall and Bhabha mention in relation to classic realism, identity politics, cultural diversity and the over-determinedness of closure (as was discussed in my introduction). Therefore, what definitive claim, if any, can be made on the basis of Duddy’s decision to follow the discourse of acquiring land? If Duddy’s actions are considered to be satirizing, what is the moral alternative? The work of the text does not leave the reader with any deterministic statement as to what choice, or discourse rather, is more favourable. Rather, the work of the text is more nuanced, more ambivalent. It is clear that the ethno-centric discourse of some of the Jews, the secular, individualist discourse of some of the Gentiles, as well as that of the assimilationist Jews presented in the novel, are not valorized. However, the text does not leave the reader with a clear alternative. Instead the cultural work of the text, represented by the ambivalence of identitary discourse and contrary to a conventional classic realist closure, is rather quite enigmatic, like the discursive and spatial instances of a Third Space.

If *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* demonstrates various characters that promote, privilege and contest ethnocentricity, as well as its effects on cultural/ethnic
formation, the very same can be said about the collection of stories *The Street*. The Jewish “ghetto mentality” observed by Ower in *Duddy Kravitz* is also heavily present throughout *The Street* where the narrator establishes the cultural differences through the geo(ethno)graphic depiction of the area:

If the Main was a poor man’s street, it was also a dividing line. Below, the French Canadians. Above, some distance above, the dreaded wasps. On the Main itself there were some Italians, Yugoslavs and Ukrainians, but they did not count as true Gentiles. Even the French Canadians, who were our enemies, were not entirely unloved. Like us, they were poor and coarse with large families and spoke English badly (Street 53)

Though the collection of stories is riddled with instances of ethnic conflicts, I would like to briefly focus on some moments that highlight ambivalent enunciations that trouble the circumscribed binaries created by religion and other cultural institutions. One such example is evidenced in the above passage where subsequent to inscribing the ethnicities that make up the designated area of Montreal, the narrator ambivalently claims: “Even the French Canadians, who were our enemies, were not entirely unloved”. This ambivalence is significant in that it demonstrates how the text is most effective at dramatizing the vacillation between critique and appreciation of otherwise competing, ‘othered’ cultural identities.

Though in the course of *The Street* it is French Canadians who battle the most with the Jewish community, there are rare moments of understanding of, or sympathy for, their “goy” adversaries: “Looking back, it’s easy to see the real trouble was there was no dialogue between us and the French Canadians, each elbowing the other, striving for
wasp acceptance” (53). Comments like these are contrasted by some other statements, as when the narrator claims, reiterating Cohen’s comment from Duddy Kravitz, that “[s]cratch the best goy and you find the worst anti-semite” (27). Other examples of what can be understood as a hybrid, Third Space is when the narrator describes a French Canadian priest who speaks Yiddish, leaving a Jewish character to claim: “Well, if you ask me, it’s none of their business. Enough’s enough, you know?” (51). The priest’s supposed transgression can be read as an attempt at the momentary achievement of hybridity in the presence of another cultural identity. Yet the voice of disapproval in the face of this hybrid, enunciative Third Space echoes the grandmother from the aforecited story discussed near the beginning of this chapter, who undermines the narrator’s newly acquired, ambivalent cultural identity with a simple question. It is worth noting that when discussing the Third Space, Robert J.C. Young claims that one of the possible negative effects of inhabiting a such a space, is that it “[is] above all a site of production, the production of anxiety” (Young 82). In these instances, anxiety occurs as a consequence of the troubling of an essentialist notion of one’s cultural identity when it is transgressed by instances of a Third Space that is located “in-between the designations of identity” that “open up the possibility of a cultural hybridity” (Bhabha 5). These in-between, Third Spaces, Bhabha claims, undermine such “hierarchal claims to the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures” (54). As this chapter has demonstrated, whether they are produced by the institution of the church or shared ethnocentricity, rigid ideologies, though frequently critiqued by both Bessette and Richler, are dramatized as threatening and undermining what can be understood as alternative Third Spaces of identity. Thus, a
Third Space is not only a difficult place to define quantifiably, it is also a difficult to place to ‘inhabit’.

Many of the conflicts throughout the texts are dramatized by the representation or enunciation of what can be characterized as a Third Space, and it is the characters that, through their enunciations and actions, briefly inhabit Third Spaces who are continuously pulled back into various associative identitary discourses (be it cultural or in terms of class). Bessette’s satiric critique of both the bourgeois, conservative audience and the abstract expressionist painters in Les pédagogues, allows the important cultural work of the novel to be described as a Third Space in that its critiques are somewhat ambivalent. Such is also the case when considering the satirical depiction of both the working class characters’ joual sociolect in La bagarre, as well as the depiction of Lebeuf and his friends’ intellectual discourse that Margo denigrates. When Richler critiques both Jewish ethnocentricism in Duddy Kravitz, as well as secular modernist individualism, the implicit moral stance, I would suggest, is somewhere ‘in-between’ in that it can be said to privilege neither one nor the other ideology but contests the limitations and territories of both. This is similar to the Jewish narrator’s ambivalent, Third Space position in many of the stories of The Street vis-à-vis the French Canadians and Anglophones. Thus, while classic realist texts tend to clarify and resolve their enigmas in some cases my selected texts do not accomplish such a definitive resolution. Rather, in keeping with the satiric ambivalence noted above, some moments in the selected texts can be said to leave open some of the questions they implicitly raise throughout the narrative. Both Lebeuf’s choice to be a supervisor and Sarto’s choice to join the union represent deterministic choices at the end of the respective narratives, but is there a sense of resolution in regards
to the identitary conflicts and discourses that both characters encounter? I would say that
the enunciative acts of these key characters, overall, promulgate contradictions and
ambivalence. This ambivalence interrogates and reveals the implicit open-endedness of
many rigid formulations of identity. These texts also provoke a questioning of the
applicability or efficacy of other theoretical concepts, concepts that I will explore in the
next chapter.
Chapter 2: The Counter-Hegemonic Bloc and Strategic Essentialism

In the early twentieth century, Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci wrote extensively about ‘hegemony’ in reference to “the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all” (Ashcroft et al. 116). Though, as Ashcroft et al. state, this domination is not exerted by force nor by active persuasion, but by a “more subtle and inclusive power over the economy, and over state apparatuses such as education and the media, by which the ruling class’s interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted”. Thus the ruling class dominates by a perceived mutual consent over its subordinate classes. This consent characterizes one of the ways the lines between the struggle for power can be understood as blurred and indistinct. It can be imagined as being consistent with Bhabha’s questioning of the binaries between the master-slave and colonized-colonizer dialectics, and his underlining of the ambivalences within such relations. Or as Steve Jones puts it in his detailed analysis of the term hegemony in his text *Antonio Gramsci*, “hegemony is a reflexive process in which the values of the power bloc, subalterns and counter-hegemonic forces are in a constant state of negotiation, compromise and change” (Jones 79). In his discussion of hegemony, Jones highlights the perpetual flux and vacillation between antagonistic groups implicit in the concept. This undermines the conscious determination of a hegemonic bloc or group, as it is rarely solidified for any length of time and always at the mercy of various ideologies and/or historical events.

A counter-hegemonic bloc is a constitutive structure intended to improve a dominated group’s social conditions, and/or socio-economic or political mobility. As will be discussed further below, Bhabha interrogates the idealist possibilities of a counter-
hegemonic bloc as a political tool. It does become apparent, however, in Bhabha’s text that the symbolic identification he refers to that is intrinsic in both a hegemonic and/or a counter-hegemonic bloc can also be read as synonymous with his notion of the Third Space and can be said to be exemplary of his notion of representation that is ‘neither the one, nor the other, but something else besides which contests and challenges the territories of both’. Another concept and method appropriated by post-colonial identified theorists that can be used to help improve the social conditions of a particular group is known as strategic essentialism. Strategic essentialism, which will be discussed further in this chapter, is a strategy that advocates the unification of divergent groups under one, essentialized formulation of identity to attain an amelioration of a group’s social status or around a question of social justice that has implications for or resonates across, and therefore can be supported by, several groups. A historical example of this was evidenced by the early Parti Québécois, that brought together leftist, left-nationalist, liberals, conservatives, and conservative nationalists, under one ethno-linguistic indentified nationalist banner. Both a counter-hegemonic bloc and a strategic essentialist strategy negotiate and sometimes momentarily sublate disparate identities in order to find a common goal that is deemed beneficial for a majority.

Also, as will be elaborated upon further, both concepts tend to differ slightly in their conceptualization, specifically in regards to the duration of employing such a strategy. Throughout this chapter, I will analyze fictionalized accounts in the primary texts that demonstrate a desire for or a partial expression of either notion, and I will interrogate the various issues surrounding its viability and efficacy, or lack thereof. Being that the accounts analysed from the texts are fictional, I am fully aware of the
dangers of conflating the social and the literary. However, I feel that the noted moments in the texts can be better appreciated through the socio-political theorizations of the aforenoted post-colonial theorists. Through the following textual analysis, it will become apparent that what can be characterized as dramatic, textual embodiments of such strategies can be said to be related to Bhabha’s conceptualization of Third Space of identity, and thus dramatize Bhabha’s conviction that such a concept is a reliable socio-political necessity and strategy.

**Counter-Hegemonies**

Interrogations into the viability of counter-hegemony are implied in Bhabha’s chapter ‘The Commitment to Theory’ from *The Location of Culture*. There he appropriates Stuart Hall’s article published in *Marxism Today* (July 1987) entitled “Blue Election, Election Blues”, and in paraphrasing Hall he emphasizes the imperative to “construct a social bloc of different constituencies, through the production of a form of symbolic identification that would result in a collective will” (Bhabha 42). Hall’s concern in his article is with the Labour Party’s (of the mid-to-late 1980’s) desire to “reinstate its traditionalist image – white, male, working class, trade union based” and how this is, as Hall suggests, “not hegemonic enough”. Bhabha agrees with Hall’s point, yet questions whether the “rationalism and intentionality that propel the collective will are compatible with the language of symbolic image and fragmentary identification” (42). This type of inquiry allows Bhabha to further discuss the issues of heterogeneity in both the social bloc and hegemony:
Not only is the social bloc heterogeneous, but, as I see it, the work of hegemony is itself the process of iteration and differentiation. It depends on the production of alternative or antagonistic images that are always produced side by side and in competition with each other. It is this side-by-side nature, this partial presence, or metonymy of antagonism, and its effective significations, that give meaning [...] to a politics of struggle as the struggle of identifications and the war of positions (43).

Bhabha’s invocation of antagonism is appropriated largely in part (which Bhabha acknowledges) from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. As the two authors note in the preface to the second edition of the text, antagonism is a concept that is central to their thesis:

> [O]ur approach conceives of universality as political universality and, in that sense, as depending on internal frontiers within society. This leads us to what is, perhaps, the most central argument of our book, which is linked to the notion of antagonism. We have explained why, in our view, neither real oppositions [...] nor dialectical contradiction can account for the specific relation that we call ‘social antagonism’. Our thesis is that antagonisms are not objective relations, but relations which reveal the limits of all objectivity. Society is constituted around these limits, and they are antagonistic limits (Laclau and Mouffe xiii)

These sites of antagonism for Laclau and Mouffe, as well as for Bhabha, open up spaces of negotiation that, as Bhabha claims, “open up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle, and destroy those negative polarities between knowledge and its objects, and between theory and practical-political reason” (Bhabha 37). Throughout this chapter, I will
demonstrate moments in the selected texts that can be said to dramatize these antagonistic relations when attempting to create a social bloc or counter-hegemonic bloc. Though Bhabha does not explicitly enunciate this, it becomes clear, as I will discuss later, that the moment of antagonistic negotiation, the location or space of such negotiation, is akin to his notion of the Third Space. Therefore, it is in that spirit that I present these fictional moments, in the hopes that they may be better understood and interpreted as literary examples of such a space.

It must be said, as I’ve alluded to before, that in ‘The Commitment to Theory’, despite Bhabha’s idealism, he does raise significant questions about the viability of a counter-hegemonic bloc:

Can such split subjects and differential social movements, which display ambivalent and divided forms of identification, be represented in a collective will that distinctively echoes Gramsci’s enlightenment inheritance and its rationalism? […] How do we construct a politics based on such a displacement of affect or strategic elaboration (Foucault), where political positioning is ambivalently grounded in an acting-out of political fantasies that require repeated passages across the differential boundaries between one symbolic bloc and an other, and the positions available to each? (43)

It is important to note here that Bhabha’s interrogation of the paradoxical unity of a counter-hegemonic bloc is based on a larger questioning in his chapter of the popular binarism between theory and politics whose “foundational basis is a view of knowledge as totalizing generality and everyday life as experience, subjectivity or false
consciousness" (44). This is a binarism he interrogates via a post-structuralist identified opposition to Enlightenment humanism and aesthetics (47). This binary between theory and practice, particularly as they relate to identifying or creating a counter-hegemonic bloc or potential literal and symbolic facets of it, can be said to be fictionalized in _Les pédagogues_ when Lambert attempts to undermine Lebeuf’s attempt at rallying the teachers to create a union. When the group of teachers initially meets with Lebeuf who explains to them that Sarto must be supported by a group of teachers if he is going to take on the school board, this leaves Lambert thinking: “Qu’on invoquât devant Sarto de grands principes abstraits, on était sûr qu’il tomberait tout de suite dans le panneau. Il oublierait qu’on parlait de lui pour considérer son cas dans l’absolu” (Pédagogues 215). Lambert, steadfastly against the union, attempts to interrogate and undermine the ‘abstract theorization’ of Lebeuf’s discourse:

- *Je ne suis pas expert en politique internationale, dit Lambert. Mais je ne vois pas bien quelle solution vous proposez à Sarto.*

- *Ce que je propose, dit Lebeuf, c’est que les professeurs s’organisent en un syndicat efficace.*

- *D’accord mais en attendant? Sarto va rester chez lui bien tranquille? Qu’est-ce que tu en dis, mon cher? Il me semble jusqu’à présent, on a discuté ton cas d’une façon un peu…théorique (215)*

Despite Lambert’s attempt to sabotage Lebeuf’s presentation and, as he intimates, its abstract theorizations (which, as I noted in the previous chapter, is perfectly in keeping with the abstract versus realist discourse in the text), Sarto is convinced that creating the union is still the best course of action. Lambert, however, in a later meeting between him
and John Sloper (as will be discussed further below) does eventually succeed in
undermining Lebeuf’s attempted bloc of ideologically diverse teachers at L’École
Pédagogique.

Yet, to return to Bhabha’s re-conceptualization of the counter-hegemonic bloc, it
is clear that he is echoing Jones’ aforenoted acknowledgment of the constant fluctuation
and negotiation within and amongst various groups. This is evident when he states that
“there is no first or final act of revolutionary social (or socialist) transformation” (45). It
also becomes evident later in the chapter, that Bhabha’s reconfiguration of a counter-
hegemonic or symbolic bloc is synonymous with his concept of a Third Space of
identification in the way that it is used to “accompany[] the ‘assimilation of contraries’”
(56). Within this Third Space, divergent identities negotiate, realign and reconstitute
themselves to form a bloc that is neither symbolized by their original ‘identity’ nor the
‘Other’ that they are attempting to usurp.

Another attempt at reconciling fragmentary identities into a symbolic bloc with its
associative goal for social/political/cultural affirmation can be said to be fictionalized, for
instance, in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz by Virgil’s dream of organizing a group
of epileptics. Virgil’s belief in a symbolic image of epileptics comprised of various
fragmented identities is enunciated through his dialogue with Duddy early in the novel:

[Virgil:] Some of the greatest men in the world were epileptics

[Duddy:] No Kidding?

[Virgil:] Julius Caesar.

[Duddy:] Yeah?

[Virgil:] Jesus Christ, even. Dostoievski. Charlie Chaplin.
[Duddy:] Charlie Chaplin is a Jew. Duddy said snidely.

[Virgil:] A guy can be both, you know.

[Duddy:] Jeez.

One can read this passage as simply comically demonstrating Virgil’s personal obsession with organizing a group of epileptics. However, considered from a more theoretical angle, this conversation is particularly effective in demonstrating how a staid belief in restrictive ethnocentricity can undermine the potential for a symbolic counter-hegemonic bloc. Duddy’s ‘snide’ response indicates the anxiety attempting to reclaim an identity that could or does co-inhabit a bloc because it implicitly or explicitly negates a monological or an essentialist notion of a singular, primary identity. In the process it highlights the ardent primacy of the Jewish identity to Duddy, above any other identification. This anxiety is a social convention that is frequently present in Richler’s oeuvre. Similar moments of anxiety also appear in The Street, as discussed in the previous chapter in regards to the Yiddish character who is upset when a French Canadian priest speaks Yiddish: “Well, if you ask me, it’s none of their business. Enough’s enough, you know” (Street 51). These moments demonstrate the ways Richler satirizes ethnocentricity, particularly its ability to undermine characters’ attempts at occupying or sustaining a Third Space that would be conducive or necessary at the level of the social to the creation and advancement of a counter-hegemonic bloc.

Richler’s The Street also dramatizes characters who attempt to suspend or circumvent ethnocentricity in order to promote and/or achieve a counter-hegemonic bloc for the sake of more generalized or broader social progress. This is most evidenced by the character of Tansky, the deli owner, who appears throughout various stories within the
text. One particular moment occurs in the story ‘The Street’ when, unlike his Jewish identified clients and comrades who secretly mock and ridicule the French Canadian truck drivers who make up some of his clientele, Tansky attempts to dialogue with them:

“He would put out delicate little feelers to the truckers. His brothers, the French Canadians. Vanquished, oppressed” (The Street 18). Tansky’s socialist identified predilection appears to be the primary impetus for his sympathy toward the outsiders: “Tansky would say, ‘Isn’t it a shame about the strikers in Granby?’ […] If one of the truckers replied, ‘It’s shit, everything’s shit’, [Tansky] would have to be reminded to add mustard and relish to the hamburgers. But if the truckers were responsive […] if one said, ‘It’s the system’, and the other, ‘Maybe after the war things will be different’ they would earn heaping plates of French fried potatoes and complimentary refills of coffee” (18).

Similar counter-hegemonic class affinities are enunciated later in the story by Tansky when the clientele discuss an article in Time magazine that characterizes the St. Urbain district as the Hell’s Kitchen of Montreal. The article discusses how the neighbourhood’s ‘squalor’ fosters a ripe climate in which communism flourishes: “We’re dirty? In my house you could eat off the floor”, “We’re not poor. I can walk into any delicatessen in town, you name it, and order whatever my little heart desires” “A Jew is never poor. Broke? Sometimes. Going through hard times? Maybe. In a strange country? Always. But poor, never” (30). Tansky becomes frustrated with this ethnic-class posturing: “Tansky threw his dishrag on the counter. ‘We are the same as everybody else’, he shouted”. Tansky’s forays into class sympathy that minimize ethnocentric concerns opens up a Third Space that can be read as a small attempt to nurture a counter-hegemonic bloc based on class consciousness. Like Bhabha’s proposal in ‘The
Commitment to Theory' where he claims “each formation encounters the displaced,
differentiated boundaries of its group representation and enunciative sites in which the
limits of social power are encountered in an agonistic relation” (Bhabha 41), the
aforenoted kinds of scenes that occur in Tansky’s deli dramatize class conscious attempts
at transgressing essentialist, ethnic-class boundaries in spite of the agonistic relations
between two cultural groups.

Tansky is one of the few characters that reappears throughout the various stories
within *The Street*, leaving some readers wondering why this might be so. Perhaps one
way of understanding Tansky’s importance to the text is to analyse the role he plays in
the community, especially around his enunciative, socialist-identified discursive acts that
are ubiquitous throughout the text and historically dramatize the presence of socialist and
communist-identified people in the Jewish community. Apart from the story “The
Street”, Tansky also appears in “The Red Menace” and “The War, Chaverim and After”.
Tansky is, as the narrator describes him, a “dedicated communist” (*The Street* 45) who
worked assiduously for the Labour-Progressive candidates within Montreal.²¹ He is not a
closeted communist, as evidenced by the above-cited scene from the deli and the
following one, as it foregrounds his questioning of the ethics of capitalism:

- What does it say in your [history] book? That the Indians were lied to, cheated,
  and exploited left, right and center by lousy imperialist adventurers like Jacques
  Cartier or that the so-called noble explorers saved Canada from the savages?
- It says that Jacques Cartier was a hero. LaSalle too. It says they were very brave
  against the Indians.
You see, at the age of eleven they're already stuffing their heads with capitalist propaganda (47).

Another situation occurs in the story “The War, Chaverim and After” where, contrary to the Jewish community’s support for the Allies during World War II, Tansky boldly questions the credibility of the British Navy:

Only Tansky, who ran the Cigar & Soda, questioned the integrity of the British War effort. Lots of ships were being sunk in the Battle of the Atlantic, true, but how many people knew that U-boat commanders never torpedoed a ship insured by Lloyd’s or that certain factories were proof against air raids, because of interlocking British directorships? (113)

While historical evidence show that such machinations were sometimes true, it is possible that this moment in the text can also be perceived by a reader as suggesting that Tansky’s ideological biases cause him to exaggerate or to be foolish. Yet, given how ubiquitous Tansky’s anti-capitalist discourse is throughout the stories and the narrator’s feelings towards him (see below), I would argue that Tansky’s depiction is intended to be perceived as neither exaggerated nor foolish. Tansky is the most resonant proponent of building a counter-hegemonic bloc against bourgeois hegemony, not only because of his socialist predilection, but also, as I mentioned earlier, because of his appreciation and willingness to transgress ethnic boundaries to achieve this aim. However it is also worth noting the narrator’s account of the hesitancy felt by Tansky’s Jewish community toward his politics: “The regulars were tolerant of Tansky’s communism, but unresponsive […] ‘Aw, it just wouldn’t look good for our people to elect a commie again. You know what I mean?’” (45). This is a subtle allusion to how many in the actual Jewish community of
the St-Urbain district were hesitant to reveal socialist identified unity in the form of a counter-hegemonic bloc. More specifically, it is a socio-historic allusion to the election of Fred Rose to the House of Commons in 1943. Rose was a Jewish Communist and a member of the communist based Labour Progressive Party. When the Igor Gouzenko case broke in 1946, Rose was implicated as a Communist spy. He was arrested under a police warrant alleging he was part of conspiracy to persuade others to commit breaches of the Official Secrets Act and was sentenced to prison for one year which deprived him of his seat in the House of Commons (Penner 220).

Therefore, Tansky’s clients’ hesitation and concern is consistent with that of many others in the Jewish community at the time who feared being typecast as communists on the basis of their cultural identity. Thus, just as actual fearful members of the Jewish community were reluctant to affiliate with socialists, so too Tansky’s Jewish customers enunciate similar concerns and undermine any attempt at creating a counter-hegemonic, socialist-identified bloc. It is important to note, however, that many Jews (unlike those in Tansky’s deli) during this time were socialist and communist identified, thereby exemplifying, through their politics, how one could inhabit more than one identity at the same time (such as the hybridity of the atheistic-identified communist who is nevertheless socio-culturally Jewish – an identity that first and foremost has a religion as its basis). This can be understood as an example of hybridity similar to the one Bhabha discusses in ‘The Commitment to Theory’ in regards to the above-cited challenges of the British Labour Party:

When it is suggested that the British Labour Party should seek to produce a socialist alliance among progressive forces that are widely dispersed and distributed
across a range of class, culture and occupational forces – without a unifying sense of the class for itself – the kind of hybridity that I have attempted to identify is being acknowledged as historical necessity (Bhabha 41)

Nonetheless, as the noted fictionalized moments demonstrate, people are often pressured away from and out of this hybrid, Third Space by competing discourses and concerns that engender fear and/or competing identitary discourses (i.e. how it was politically dangerous to be a communist in the period after Fred Rose’s conviction; Judaism versus an atheist-identified discourse.

Representations of characters negotiating a counter-hegemonic bloc when faced with rigid identitary discourse also appear in Bessette’s *Les pédagogues*. The primary conflict of the novel is Sarto Pellerin’s attempt at creating a counter-hegemonic bloc in opposition to the school board that fired him. Sarto attempts to do this through the form of a union of professors despite the individualist tendencies of many of the teachers. The individualistic disposition of the majority of the characters is also enriched by Bessette’s formalistic choices, which he acknowledges in Donald Smith’s *Voices of Deliverance*: “I tried to present each chapter from the point of view of one character” (Smith 111), which is a similar formalistic strategy employed in *La bagarre*. An attempt at creating a counter-hegemonic bloc to circumvent the teachers’ individualistic disposition occurs near the end of the novel when Lebeuf attempts to convince Sarto to be the leader of the teacher’s union as various established union leaders from other professions arrive:

Trois hommes pénètrent dans la salle. Lebeuf fit les présentations. Il y avait Harvey, un grand type osseux à l’accent anglais, aux cheveux roux, au nez coudé parcouru de veinules violettees, et qui représentait les cheminots. Denieff, un juif
d’origine polonaise, la figure plate, le nez aquilin chaussé de lunettes d’écaillles – le président des débardeurs; enfin, Jos Lacasse, un Canadien français à figure chafouine, vêtu d’un pullover douteux et dont les cheveux blondasses, raides comme des cordes, balayaient le front étroit: il dirigeait le syndicat des boulangers et confiseurs (Pédagogues 297)

This scene is particularly poignant in that the ethnic and cultural communities each union leader represents were, particularly during the historical moment of 1950’s Quebec, frequently, though not always, antagonistic towards each other. Francophone, Anglophone and Jewish relations were often tumultuous during this time, yet in this instance each group has presumably elided their differences to come together in the hope of forming a counter-hegemonic bloc of diverse unions. This moment can also perhaps be read as Bessette injecting some form of comic irony in that despite the intra-cultural differences during this historic period, these disparate groups nevertheless are working together. More importantly, however, this scene underscores the importance of the negotiation of cultural identity to create a counter-hegemonic bloc.

As Jones alludes to in his text *Antonio Gramsci*, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic blocs are in constant negotiation and therefore can not remain fixed for long as they are forced to evolve, expand, separate and sometimes integrate other constituencies, communities or identity groups into the whole. The tensions of such a new, temporary and evolving consensus is evident earlier in *Les pédagogues* when Lebeuf explains to Pellerin how there are class-based tensions involved in getting the teachers to commit to a union: “[L]a grève, chez les bourgeois, a mauvaise réputation. Les collets blancs ne disent pas clairement, remarquez, mais au fond, pour eux, faire la...”
grève, c’est se ‘ravaler’ au niveau des ouvriers” (214) In associating the ‘collets blancs’ teachers’ ideological biases with the bourgeois class, Lebeuf recognizes a major reason for their ambivalence about associating with blue collar and labour workers involved in many of the unions. It is also interesting to note the ambivalent or ‘in-between’ identity many teachers actually felt they held during this historical time. This fictional dramatization is historically evidenced by the director of the newspaper *L’Enseignement* in 1952, when he characterized teachers as “demi-peuple et demi-bourgeois” (Rouillard 226). Rouillard further speaks to this ambiguity when he remarks how:

> Le syndicalisme chez le personnel enseignant vit une ambigüité qu’il ne résoudra que dans les années soixante: il est partagé entre l’attrait pour les corporations professionnelles (Barreau, Collège des médecins, etc.), dont les enseignants convoitent le prestige social, et l’obligation de négocier avec les commissions scolaires pour améliorer leur sort. Chaque enseignant est convaincu, d’une part, qu’il appartient à un groupe social supérieur; mais, en même temps, il doit recourir à des moyens de pressions calqués sur ceux des travailleurs (Rouillard 226)

If the teachers saw themselves as part of the bourgeois, hegemonic class, a class that would not lower itself to collaborating with the blue-collar class, it is possible to imagine that a mutual resentment was often felt by the latter group. This latter possibility is fictionalized by the union leaders’ dialogue when they are assembled by Lebeuf in his attempt to convince them to support a possible teachers’ union:

> - Mais les instituteurs, quoi ce qui ont à voir avec nous autres? Ils font seulement pas partie des syndicats québécois! C’est une organisation séparée qu’ils ont.
- I think Jo's right, dit Denieff, qui s'exprimait en un mélange indigeste d'anglais et de français. Nous avons assez de nos troubles sans nous fourrer dans ceux des instituteurs. *White collars have nothin' in common with us anyway.* [...]

- Tu peux le dire, fit Lacasse. Je parle pas de M. Pellerin, bien sûr, mais excusez l'expression, des chieux parmi les collets blancs, c'est comme ça. (Les doigts légèrement écartés, il leva devant lui les deux mains.) (Pédagogues 299)

This theme of counter-productive class consciousness is similar to the one in Bessette's *La bagarre* where Lebeuf as a would-be writer is attempting to be a member of the working classes but is met with scepticism by his co-worker Charlot: “Tu fais ton ouvrage, c’est ben correct [...] Mais n’empêche que c’est pas la même chose. T’es comme qui dirait un touriste, toué, icitte” (La bagarre 69). The antagonistic discourse of reactionary class consciousness directed at Lebeuf as a university student is later modified into a form of classism towards him as supervisor near the end of the novel (as was discussed in the last chapter, particularly in regard to Shek’s comments) despite his attempts at helping his counter-hegemonic group of workers by accepting Stevens’ offer of becoming a supervisor to ensure an improvement in the employees’ salaries. The group of tramway workers in *La bagarre* can be understood as counter-hegemonic in that they come from various ethnic-linguistic and ideological groups (Charlot the Italian worker, Bouboule the elderly and profane sweeper described as having “une âme de révolutionnaire” (63) and the university student Lebeuf, to name a few) and that they are trying to end their exploitation executed by their superiors. Though despite the fact that they succeed in getting a raise in salary (under the condition that Lebeuf becomes a supervisor), Lebeuf’s question, however, near the end of the novel as to whether “Élever
(270) can be answered, in this textual case, in the negative. This is caused by the class and ethnic biases that restrict the various characters from transgressing their respective identity groups.  

Like the tramway workers in *La bagarre*, the three union leaders in *Les pédagogues* are wary and circumspect of anyone who is outside their ethnic-class identified groups. But unlike the tramways workers in *La bagarre*, the three union leaders’ scepticism at accepting the teachers into their unions’ nascent, counter-hegemonic bloc is put at ease as Lebeuf and Harvey convince them that their own respective unions were at one point in a similar situation as the teachers. They, like the teachers, needed and were given support by other unions that therefore allowed them to be more effective in striking. Finally, it’s an anecdote by Pellerin that convinces them to support the teachers. When Lacasse asks Pellerin what it was he said that got him fired, Pellerin responds:  

*J’ai dit à un chanoine à la Commission que la religion et l’enseignement, c’étaient deux choses différentes, répondit Sarto. Il était question d’engager un Polonais, docteur en mathématiques, pour enseigner à l’École Pédagogique. On n’en voulait pas sous prétexte qu’il n’allait pas à l’église, peut-être parce que c’était un étranger* (302)  

leaving some of the union leaders to claim:  

- *Tu vois, Denieff, dit Harvey. Quoi ce que tu penses de ça?*  
- *They’re a bunch of sonnabitches*, dit Denieff [...]
Lacasse’s comment articulates a critique of the collusive, hegemonic power of the clergy and politicians during La grande noirceur in Québec under Duplessis’ Union Nationale (as was discussed in the previous chapter). This collusion was, as Rouillard reports, bent on undermining teachers in their attempts at attaining a better standard of living and more institutional autonomy and power. Rouillard discusses how the CIC (Corporation générale des instituteurs et institutrices de la province) “a peut-être revalorisé le statut des enseignants à leurs propres yeux, mais il a peu contribué à améliorer leurs conditions matérielles” citing that in 1960 “à peine deux cents conventions collectives ont été négociées alors que le Québec compte 1800 commissions scolaires”. Rouillard further suggests that this was a goal that both government and church favoured, putting all their support and influence behind the CIC. Finally, however, the Duplessis government pushed further to restrain the unions: “Le gouvernement Duplessis vote une brochette de lois destinées à restreindre le droit des enseignants aux négociations collectives (Rouillard 233). Rouillard continues to name a number of laws that were implemented from the mid-to-late 40’s until the end of the 50’s that were explicitly created by Duplessis to break the strength and solidarity of the various teachers’ unions. As some of the union victories of the 50’s and 60’s demonstrated and Les pédagogues accurately fictionalizes, the necessity of creating a counter-hegemonic bloc for trade union and social progress was made possible by strategically bypassing ethnic and class concerns. This diminution and suppression of ethno-linguistic and/or class difference can also be
understood as a strategic essentialist move in that it is a short-term strategy to create a counter-hegemonic bloc for political purposes.

As discussed earlier, Lambert is the most persistent in attempting to undermine Lebeuf’s desire to create a union that can become part of a counter-hegemonic bloc. After the teachers initial meeting with Lebeuf, Lambert meets with John Sloper (the English teacher at L’École Pédagogique) to discuss the meeting. Sloper tells Lambert how he is having difficulties making enough money to make ends meet, particularly because his wife is ill and he is having trouble paying the medical bills, claiming that: “Il devrait vraiment y avoir des lois pour protéger les pauvres gens” (Pédagogues 238). Lambert, faced with Sloper’s concerns, suspects that Sloper may side with Lebeuf and cunningly states: “Des lois? [...] Vous me surprenez, mon cher. Je ne vous croyais pas socialiste” (238). Sloper then anxiously reacts:

John Sloper se redressa sur son siège. Le socialisme était au contraire un de ses bêtes noires. Le gouvernement, il l’avait toujours dit, possédait déjà trop de pouvoir. Il taxait les pauvres gens à la limite et ensuite il avait beau jeu de les diriger selon son bon plaisir. Ce n’était plus, comme autrefois, par respect pour l’autorité légalement constituée que les gens obéissaient aux lois, mais uniquement par peur d’encourir une amende (238)

After Sloper’s aversion to socialism presented through indirect discourse by the narrator, Lambert “aluma une cigare. Un sourire errait sur ses lèvres” and he responds “Je suis très heureux, mon cher, [...] de vous entendre exprimer cet avis” (238). Lambert successfully reinforces Sloper’s anti-socialist hegemonic discourse. A similar dialogue is presented earlier in the novel when Lambert also convinces Joyal that joining a counter-hegemonic
group in a strike will not be strong enough to undermine the hegemonic power of the
government and the church:

- La grève?...Je vous le répète, mon cher, vous êtes resté trop longtemps à
l'étranger. Les instituteurs l’ont faite, eux, la grève, voilà quelques années:
demandez-leur ce que ça leur a donné! […]

- Je sais, dit Joyal. Je ne suis pas aveugle. Mais devant une couillonnade semblable,
ils vont se réveiller, bon Dieu! […]

- Écoutez, mon cher, je le dis cette fois sans ironie; je crois vraiment que vous
n’avez pas compris […] Il y a deux puissances ici qui mènent tout: les politiciens
et les clergé. Lesquels sont les plus forts? C’est assez difficile à dire. Parce que
très souvent leurs intérêts coïncident (210)

Once they arrive at the house where Lebeuf and the rest of the teachers await them,
Lambert says to Joyal: “Eh bien, voyons voir ce que nos petits révolutionnaires ont à
nous raconter” (210). Lambert’s constant denigration of the proposed counter-hegemonic
bloc is coupled with his negatively-charged discourse that Joyal has become a ‘stranger’
to his land and is now out of touch with what has happened, socio-politically, in Quebec.
This discourse, as well as the fear ridden, anti-socialist or anti-communist discourse that
Lambert shares with Sloper is eventually enough to sabotage the teachers attempt to form
a union with Sarto Pellerin.

I would like to now return to the case of Tansky in The Street, as it is worth
mentioning that despite the growing anxiety of being associated with communism during
a tumultuous anti-communist moment in history, it appears that Tansky’s Jewish
clientele, as well as the community overall, are relatively non-plussed by his communist
politics. Tansky’s consequent indifference to his ethnic and cultural identity, however, does yield some ire: “Although I liked Tansky enormously, there were others, among them my uncles, who were hostile because he defiantly ate pork and remained open on Yom Kippur” (47). This citation, coupled with the following account by the narrator who recounts how the family downstairs “turned out to be communists too and [he] was warned not to speak to them” (47), raises the question of how Tansky could be accepted in the community. I posit that one of the heretofore overlooked reasons Tansky is accepted within the community is by virtue of his being the proprietor of the deli shop. The deli shop serves as a locus where people from the Jewish community can congregate and commune, but moreover, it facilitates the affirmation and preservation of Jewish culture through food. Perhaps if Tansky were a taxi driver or a tailor he would be treated with more scorn and rancour than he is in the text, like the neighbours to whom the narrator is not allowed to speak. Despite these antagonistic discourses, Tansky is, I would argue, a personification of the Third Space in that he is ambivalent in his ethnic and cultural stances. And though Third Spaces are necessarily fluid or temporary, I would also argue that the deli’s role as a provider of ethnic-identified foods, and by extension Tansky as the proprietor of a space that valorizes and facilitates the Jewish community, allows his in-betweenness to pass or be accepted by the more conservative or traditional Jewish members of his community. The above examples, which are quite important to the respective narratives and the development of certain key characters, demonstrate moments of the creation of or attempts to encourage a counter-hegemonic bloc. However, though the agents of these blocs such as Tansky, Lebeuf and Sarto are
promoting and attempting to create them for the good of their respective communities, competing discourses often tend to undermine them.

**Strategic Essentialism**

I would now like to discuss how other moments within the texts are similar in how they attempt to encourage another strategy that is traditionally understood as a tool used for positive, social and political progress: the notion and practice of strategic essentialism. The term ‘strategic essentialism’ was coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and first referred to in her interview with Elizabeth Grosz entitled “Criticism, Feminism and the Institution” (1984). This interview, first published in *Thesis Eleven*, was later included along with other interviews with Spivak in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. In the interview, Spivak states:

> I think we have to choose again strategically, not universal discourse but essentialist discourse. I think that since as a deconstructivist – see, I just took a label upon myself - I cannot in fact clean my hands and say ‘I’m specific’. In fact I must say I am an essentialist from time to time (Grosz 11)

A little later in the interview Spivak claims: “I think it’s absolutely on target to take a stand against the discourses of essentialism, universalism […] But strategically we cannot” (11). The ‘we’ Spivak enunciates is in reference to, as she alludes to subsequently in the interview, the advocates of feminism to whom she recommends such a strategy. In *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, Stephen Morton further elaborates on Spivak’s strategic essentialism, suggesting that “[f]or minority groups, in particular, the use of essentialism as a short-term strategy to affirm a political identity can be effective,
as long as this identity does not then get fixed as an essential category by a dominant group” (Morton 75). There are some similarities as well as a subtle difference between strategic essentialism and a counter-hegemonic bloc. First, both are strategies often used by a group of people who feel that they are marginalized by dominant, hegemonic social formations and use such a strategy to resist their marginalization. Second, the role identity plays in each is significant. Strategic essentialism is used to assert a unified, essentialist form of identity to affirm unity and avert any type of negative actions towards it. Similarly, a counter-hegemonic bloc, as already discussed, seeks to ally disparate identities for the purpose of a common cause in opposition to an existing hegemony. The importance of the temporality of the strategy is inherent to both, as cited above. In an instance of strategic essentialism, its temporality is explicitly discussed, whereas a counter-hegemonic bloc’s recognition of its temporality tends to be implicit. This is evidenced by Jones’ allusion when, once again, he states how “hegemony is a reflexive process in which the values of the power bloc, subalterns and counter-hegemonic forces are in a constant state of negotiation, compromise and change” (Jones 79). This constant state of compromise and change implicitly underlines the temporality of such a strategy. Essentialism and its affects on identity, as well as how it is used, is evident in the following excerpts from the primary texts that explore and analyze how characters can be said to resort to or embody essentialist discourse, and how even when meant to be used as positive, identity affirming or politically scrupulous means, still run the risk of promoting fixity and ossification. These following fictional representations of essentialism (strategic and otherwise) implicitly interrogate its positive effects and limitations.
One of the most ubiquitous conventions in Mordecai Richler's oeuvre is the use of characters who can be said to personify or promote essentialist ideologies. In his novel *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, Richler is often very effective at presenting and satirizing essentialism. But, as I have asked before, if it is implicit in creating satire that one is also taking a moral stance in the novel, what stances are Richler’s narrator taking? Locating a particular moral stance proves to be very difficult. On the first page of the novel, the narrator recounts the influx of Gentiles at the Fletcher’s Field High School: “[T]here were already three gentiles in the school (that is to say, Anglo-Saxons; for Ukranians, Poles, and Yugoslavs, with funny names and customs of their own did not count as true gentiles)” (*Apprenticeship* 2). What, then, makes for a true Gentile? Is it possible that the narrator is guilty of perpetuating the same kind of essentialist enunciatory act presented by the various essentialist discourses promulgated by characters throughout the novel? Perhaps the narrator’s comment is based more on class in that it can be understood as implicit that Gentiles who do not live in the ‘Saint-Urbain ghetto’ are in fact true Gentiles. Again, as mentioned throughout this thesis, the reader is presented with the inter-connectedness or interdiscursivity of class with ethnic identity within the text. More importantly, however, is that at this moment, very early on in the text, the narrator foreshadows one of the most dominant discourses throughout the novel, the cultural commonality and importance of categorizing people ethnically, or the reification of ethnic or cultural identity. Yet Duddy Kravitz, the main character of the novel, is one of the most ambivalent characters throughout the text particularly in regards to essentialist notions of Jewishness. He vacillates between seemingly supporting essentialist notions of Jewish identity and mocking or distancing himself from them.
One of these moments occurs early in the first chapter of the novel, when Duddy and his friends discover that a Christian mission has opened up in their neighbourhood. They immediately enter the mission and slyly convince the missionary that they are interested in joining the Catholic faith and that other students at their local high school are interested as well, knowing full well that this will cause an uproar in the Jewish community. Duddy’s prank and his apparent antagonism towards Christians attempting to convert Jews is perfectly in keeping with what, as cited in my previous chapter, Ower claims is a defensive dogma of the Jewish culture that seeks to preserve itself from being eradicated. This protectionism takes the form of strategic essentialism, enunciated later in the chapter by Max, Duddy’s father, when Duddy tells him that there is a Christian missionary distributing pamphlets at his high school: “Something oughta be done” Duddy says to his father “The PTA oughta complain”. Max supports Duddy’s concerns: “That’s true. It’s not like we were chinks or something” (22). Max’s characterization throughout the text is far from being understood as that of an orthodox Jew, yet he sees a threat in Christians that are attempting to indoctrinate Jews in the area and consequently decides to strategically essentialize himself as a defender of the Jewish faith and, by extension, Jewish culture. However, for Duddy it is made plain that this is a tactic of his to gain acceptance from his father, a psychological motif that is present throughout the novel. And even though Duddy acts sincerely in his condemnation of the missionary, immediately after the dialogue with his father, he and his friends then go to the Lubovitcher Yeshiva and assault the rabbinical college students with snowballs and wash some of the students’ faces with snow. On the one hand, Duddy’s supposed support and defense of the Jewish faith can be initially understood as a form of strategic essentialism,
yet it is apparent that he only does so as both a childish prank and as a way to gain respect in the eyes of his father. His subsequent attack and ridicule of the rabbinical college students highlights his strategic apathy towards more orthodox followers and believers of the Jewish faith, which many in the community believe is one of the most effective ways of preserving their culture. This contradiction in Duddy’s strategic usage of essentialism as well as Max’s defense of the Jewish faith and his aversion towards Jewish orthodoxy can be interpreted as demonstrating a satirical view of essentialism through its ambivalent deployment.

It is the characters that get jostled within the complexities of essentialist beliefs, as well as corollary assumptions about ethnic and cultural communities, that make The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz so productive in understanding inter- and intra-cultural relations. As discussed in the previous chapter, Duddy is caught between the expectations of him that are largely informed by Jewish cultural and ethnic essentialist beliefs (i.e. not marrying a shiksa, Simcha’s incantation about the necessity of obtaining land that emblemizes the Jewish dream of the Promise Land), as well as assumptions about the world outside the ghetto (i.e. becoming a successful ‘somebody’). Duddy’s understanding of Gentiles outside the ‘ghetto’ is comically portrayed throughout the text, such as when he states to Calder (the affluent Anglo-Canadian whose daughter Lennie illegally performed an abortion on): “You guys never say what’s on your mind. It’s not well – polite. Right?” (265) (And what is to be made of the ironic moment when Duddy realizes that the mythologized ‘Boy Wonder’, who has supposedly become a ‘somebody’ outside the Ghetto, is a ‘nobody’ in the eyes of Calder?). Duddy’s understanding of Gentiles is partly informed by paranoid discourses, such as the one evidenced in my
previous chapter where I discussed Mister Cohen’s claim that “[Gentiles] are all Nazis. You scrape down deep enough and you’ll see” (272). Such examples point to the conflicts between the ethnic and cultural communities in and outside the Saint-Urbain Ghetto, which has also been noted by Rachel Brenner in *Assimilation and Assertion: The Response to the Holocaust in Mordecai Richler’s Writing*. In her text, she suggests that:

*[The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz]* exposes the Jewish community’s moral confusion and ambivalence in relation to the Gentile world. While Lenny becomes the victim of his Gentile friends, Duddy becomes the victimizer of the Gentile. The absence of a unified world picture is demonstrated by the older generations of Simcha and Benjy. The juxtaposition of the conflicting messages to assimilate and to assert oneself as a Jew is both disorienting and demoralizing (Brenner 190). In addition to Brenner’s point, it can be said that Richler’s satire of essentialist notions of Jewish and Gentile identities, as dramatized by the characters that challenge and are caught between identitary discourses, feed the “moral confusion and ambivalence in relation to the Gentile world” that she suggests is apparent in the novel. In “Sociology, Psychology and Satire in the Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz” John Ower also speaks to the ambivalence vis-à-vis the noted ethnic communities: “The relationship of the Montreal Jewish community to both Anglo-Saxons and French Canadians is ambivalent” (Ower 413). This ambivalence, as Richler also effectively dramatizes in *The Street*, and which will be discussed later in this chapter, is related to the complex power relationship between the Jewish and French Canadian communities who are battling for acceptance by the Anglo-Canadian hegemony.
A similar ambivalence, however, is dramatized in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* within the discourses of escapism from the Ghetto through education, which is personified by Lennie, who appears to be interpellated by assimilation discourse in the first half of the novel. Ower states that “[t]his is not to say that Richler sees outright assimilation as either possible or worthwhile. As usual his attitude is complex and ambivalent” (416). Ower claims that the goal of using higher education to escape the Jewish ghetto is undermined in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* by the emblematic depiction of Irwin Shubert, an assimilationist par excellence. As discussed in Chapter 1, Irwin is often anxious to erase his (or others) signs of Jewishness. Riva (a girl Lennie briefly dates in the narrative) also confirms Irwin’s assimilationism when she tells Duddy that Lennie is also an assimilationist for hanging out with Irwin and a gang of non-Jewish friends (169). This is further confirmed by Duddy’s high school friend Bernie shortly after Duddy’s meeting with Riva, who emphasizes the ethnic/class divide in describing the assimilationist crowd Lennie hangs around with: “They’re mostly rich kids, Duddy. Goys” (170). But if Richler is satirizing Irwin Shubert, and by extension assimilationist discourse, what is the moral stance that the text or the narrator is possibly ultimately taking? That the Jewish identity must be defended and preserved through essentialist notions of itself? Taking into account Richler’s equal satirical treatment of the dogmatic Jewish characters such as Simcha and Lennie (the latter particularly toward the end of the novel), it would seem that the text is cautiously ambivalent about making a definitive claim as to how one can preserve the Jewish ethnic and cultural identity. In an analogous vein, Ower discusses Richler’s ability to interrogate the binary choice of being assimilated or adopting a ruthless life outside the Ghetto: “[Richler’s] mixed feelings of
Jewish-Anglo-Saxon relations are seen in his partial condemnation of both of two contrasting sets of characters [Irwin and Lennie on one hand and Duddy, Cohen and Dingleman on the other]" (416). What Ower claims are "mixed feelings", are what I would argue examples of the ambivalence of the texts’ cultural work in presenting a dialogical fiction that dramatizes the conflictive tensions of culturally and ethnically bound essentialist beliefs. The characters that subscribe to these cultural and essentialist beliefs are often satirized, including the characters that take a distinctive opposite view (Uncle Benjy, Irwin Shubert), which implicitly valorizes an ambivalent stance towards both social discourses as demonstrated by the text’s wariness of essentialism.

Like Richler’s *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, Gérard Bessette’s *La bagarre* dramatizes various examples of how essentialist concepts of identity affect the image of a community. The novel opens with a scene during a burlesque show at a bar named ‘La Bougrine’. The narrator describes the bar’s décor as follows:

La Bougrine différait des autres boîtes montréalaises. Au lieu d’un décor impersonnel, genre américain, l’intérieur représentait un camp de bûcherons […] Les garçons portaient tuques à pompons, mocassins et costume de *lumber jacks*. Le spectacle, entièrement en français, se composait de quadrilles, de chansons du terroir et d’histoires à double sens (Bagarre 15)

Given all of these cultural stereotypes, the American Ken Weston fails to see the appeal of the place, unlike his friend, Jules Lebeuf, who claims: “Ouais, ça donne du coeur au ventre!” (16). Weston sees the identity formulating work perpetuated by the bar’s decor as being cheap and problematic, whereas Lebeuf valorizes it: “‘[Q]uand les caricatures d’un pays se répandent comme ça un peu partout, c’est bon signe’. ‘Bon signe! Hell! On
passe pour des sauvages en Europe!” Lebeuf retorts: “C’est encore mieux que de passer pour rien. Les Français savent même pas qu’on sacre, ici, au Canada!” (17). The signifiers of identity Lebeuf and ‘La bougrine’ valorize are signs of a rigid formulation of identity congruent with what Bhabha speaks to in his essay ‘The Other Question.’ Bhabha claims that “[f]lexity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition” (Bhabha 94). Yet for Lebeuf, La Bougrine’s use of the stereotype can be said to represent a form of strategic essentialism in affirming the identity of the French Canadian people. However, if strategic essentialism is only meant to be used, as Spivak suggests, for a political goal, what are the conditions of that political strategy within the terms of La bagarre? Can it be used, as I believe is Lebeuf’s understanding, to simply affirm a group identity? Also, if it is only meant to be used as a short term strategy, as Morton suggests above, how can one guarantee it will be used temporarily when it occurs in a physical, commercial space that profits from, as Bhabha suggests, “daemonic repetition”?

Weston apparently realizes the dangers of this, as evidenced by his comparisons of La Bougrine with American “westerns” and “gangster joints” that are “tourist traps” (16). Lebeuf, however, does not see this as a negative attribute and continues his discourse of international stereotypes:

L’Italien, dit-il, les moustaches en croc, mange du spaghetti en chantant des airs d’opéra; le Français donne des poignées de main et retrousse des jupons; l’Anglais, les fesses serrées dans son smoking, contemple l’empire du haut de son monopole;
Bessette demonstrates through this textual example the difficulties inherent in accepting or adopting strategic essentialism to affirm one's identity in that it can become a fixed, repetitive, stereotypical image of a culture or ethnicity. Lebeuf's lack of acknowledgement of this is particularly ironic, given that he is the character most concerned with elevating the French-Canadian people to a level of intellectual well-being beyond the stereotypical image of uneducated lumberjacks. Whether intentionally or not, this sequence may cause one to question the short-term viability of a strategy of strategic essentialism as well as its counter-productivity in creating a fixed stereotypical description of a people, a stereotype that renders it difficult to escape from.

Essentialist stereotypes of identity is a theme that also runs through many of the stories of *The Street*. Like *La bagarre*, *The Street* demonstrates how essentialist stereotypes can be emphasized based on whatever 'other' is present in a given situation. In the story 'The Main', the narrator gives an account of the antagonisms between the French Canadian and Jewish communities and the antagonistic essentialist stereotypes conceived and deployed by each group:

We fought the French Canadians stereotype for stereotype. If many of them believed that the St. Urbain Street Jews were secretly rich, manipulating the black market, then my typical French Canadian was a moronic gum-chewer. He wore his greasy black hair parted down the middle and also affected an eyebrow moustache. His zoot trousers were belted just under the breastbone and ended in a peg hugging his ankles (Street 53)
The narrator’s ability to satirically dramatize essentialist notions is possibly best, or most positively used in ‘Pinky’s Squealer’. In the story, essentialist notions of Jewish ethnicity are enunciated, such as when the group of boys are attempting to buy a Pepsi at a soft drink stand but are fearful of stepping onto the beach that is reserved for Gentiles: “‘Gas should go,’ Hershey said. ‘He’s the least Jewish-looking of the gang. Look at his nose – Christ! They’ll take him for a goy easy.’” (64). But it is the moment when the group of boys decides to steal an anti-Semitic sign that the narrator presents the most comic and effective example of strategic essentialism. The sign, stating “This Beach is Restricted to Gentiles”, is brought to the Jewish beach and rewritten, stating: “This Beach is Restricted to Litvaks” (the term Litvaks is a Yiddish word that refers to Lithuanian Jews). The rewriting of the sign and the presentation of it in a public space demonstrates a moment of strategic essentialism that is in keeping with Morton’s discussion of the term. This is evident particularly in his example of a Gay Pride march: “the affirmation of queerness as a positive term of identification during Gay Pride marches can be an effective political strategy for resisting homophobia in a [sic] public, urban space” (Morton 75). The public space mentioned by Morton, like the beach in the story, serves as a contestatory ground where various groups battle for acceptance and recognition, radicalizing an otherwise tranquil yet, hegemonic place such as an ethnically restrictive beach.

As mentioned earlier, one of the things that makes The Street so effective is the narrator’s ability, like Duddy in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, to strategically position himself in regards to identity. This positioning often takes a strategic essentialist form and is frequently based on whatever ‘other’ is present. The example from ‘Pinky’s Squealer’ demonstrates one of the most common antagonistic relationships within the
text, the Jewish community versus the Gentiles. But there are also moments that demonstrate the ‘other’ as coming from a shared cultural or ethnic-linguistic group similar to the cited passage from La bagarre where Lebeuf is concerned about how French Canadians are perceived by and construct identity based on the opinions of the French in Europe. In the story “The Main”, the narrator describes Jewish refugees entering the area inhabited by the narrator’s established Jewish Canadian community. When confronted by Jewish refugees who speak better English and feel that Canadian cities are provincial, the narrator’s response is that “[w]e real Canadians were hostile [to them]” (58). Likewise, in “The War, Chaverim, and After”, when the narrator is faced with a Jewish refugee from Poland who had an “unsanitary way of licking his thumb before turning a page of the Aufbau” (a journal for German speaking Jews around the globe) the narrator states: “I was a real Canadian and could understand people not liking Blumberg, maybe even finding him funny” (111). In both instances the narrator strategically essentializes his adopted Canadian identity by claiming that he is a ‘real’ Canadian, but only when faced with an ‘other’. But what is the essential characteristic of a ‘real’ Canadian? There is no evidence to suggest that the narrator has any particular quality that would allow him to hierarchize his national identity over that of the other characters mentioned in the above citations.

Though this may not be a textual rendition of strategic essentialism as Spivak would define it, nor perhaps even as Morton does, it is clear that the narrator is strategically choosing to essentialize his identity to defend what he believes are insults towards or attacks against it. Furthermore, if Morton claims that “[t]he idea of strategic essentialism accepts that essentialist categories of human identity should be criticized, but
emphasizes that one cannot avoid using such categories at times in order to make sense of the social and political world” (Morton 75), is the narrator’s use of essentialism in these examples not a way to make sense of his social world? I believe that it is, but in a reactionary, ‘othering’ way that may be adverse to Spivak’s postcolonial politics. This instance, particularly in comparison to Lebeuf in La bagarre who believes it a necessity to strategically essentialize an identity in relation to an ‘other’, (as well as the afore mentioned moments in Duddy Kravitz with Duddy or Max’s reactionary essentialism) demonstrates the consequent, often negative effects of essentialism.

Richler’s The Street provides some of the most poignant examples of essentialism, but not without complementary ambivalences. One significant dramatization of strategic essentialism, as per how Spivak defines it, occurs at the very end of the text in “The War, Chaverim, And After” where the narrator recounts the historic date of November 29, 1947 when the United Nations approved a partition plan, creating the state of Israel:

[W]e gathered at Habonim and marched downtown in a group, waving Israeli flags, flaunting our songs in WASP neigbourhoods, stopping to blow horns and pull down street car wires, until we reached the heart of the city where, as I remember it, we faltered briefly, embarrassed, self-conscious, before we put a halt to traffic by forming in defiant circles and dancing the hora in the middle of the street. ‘Who am I?’ ‘YISROAL.’ ‘Who are you?’ ‘YISROAL.’ ‘All of us?’ ‘YISRO-YISRO-YISROAL.’ (Street 119)

The above expression of solidarity in support of the creation of a Jewish state is a significant example of strategic essentialism in the text. Similar to the various examples
cited from the other texts, this instance of strategic essentialism takes place in a public space and defiantly demonstrates a unitary sense of belongingness. Though what follows this demonstration is Richler’s effective use of the questioning and undermining of such a strategy:

In the febrile days that followed the proclamation of the State of Israel, we gathered nightly at Habonim to discuss developments in Eretz and at home. A distinguished Jewish doctor was invited to address the Canadian Club. To our astonishment, the doctor said that though he was Jewish, he remained, first of all, a Canadian. Israel, he warned, would make for divided loyalties, and he was opposed to the establishment of the new state (119)

This scene, coupled with the subsequent one in the story where Canada’s glamorous war ace, Buzz Beurling, had joined the Israeli air force but “the price was a thousand dollars a month. We had outbid the Arabs” (119) undermines the aforecited ethnic and cultural pride, thus effectively demonstrating the ambivalence I have been discussing. At the outset, Richler cogently sets up the pride; the sense of kinship and community one feels for one’s ethnic or cultural community, mixed with a subtle sense of defiance and brazenness. And then, as with a house of cards, he effectively collapses all the fervor and enthusiasm he previously sets up. The subsequent scene, the last scene in the story as well as in the text, effectively concludes the book with an indeterminate, ambivalent moment. After a series of minor scandals and faced with the contradictory sentiments as enunciated above by the doctor or the revelation of Buzz Beurling’s price, the youth group who regularly met at the Habonim, begins to disband:
Abruptly, our group began to disintegrate. We had finished high school. Some of the *chaverim* actually went to settle in Eretz, others entered university, still more took jobs [...] We made new friends, found fresh interests. Hershey entered McGill. My marks weren’t high enough and I had to settle for the less desirable Sir George Williams College. Months later I ran into Hershey at the *Café André*. He wore a white sweater with a big red M and sat drinking beer with a robust bunch of blond boys and girls. Thumping the table, they sang loudly: ‘If all the girls were like rabbits, and I was a hare I’d teach them bad habits.’ My companions were turning out a little magazine. I had written my first poem. Hershey and I waved at each other, embarrassed. He didn’t come to my table; I didn’t go to his (121)

This scene, concluding the series of short stories, ends on a note of reluctance about all the chauvinism that appears in this story and the others from the text. The narrator and his friend are split by class and social divides, rather by the staunch ethnic and cultural identification they so audaciously shared and are now left embarrassed. That Richler ends the text with this scene, I believe, underscores the theme of ambivalence in many of the stories whether towards ethnic, cultural class discourse.

I would now like to return to the scene in *Les pédagogues* where Pellerin recounts why he was laid off his job at l’École pédagogique. As I mentioned earlier, Pellerin recounts how the committee decided not to hire Chavinski based on the latter’s ambiguous religious predisposition. Yet Pellerin also suggests that the reason the decision was made “[P]eut etre parce que c’était un étranger” (*Pédagogues* 302). This statement makes Harvey immediately say to Denieff who, like Chavinski, is Polish: “Tu vois, Denieff [...] Quoi ce que tu penses de ça?” “They’re a bunch of sonnavabitches”
replies Denieff. There is no textual indication throughout the novel that supports Pellerin’s claim that Chavinski was not hired because of his ethnic identity, however his claim that this may be the reason the committee did not accept him is a strategic move that Pellerin knows will trigger a defensive claim by Denieff, predicated on the assumption that Denieff, being Polish, may sympathize with someone from his ethnic community and defend him. Otherwise, why would Pellerin add this assumption, presented as fact, to his story? I believe Pellerin’s strategic use of Chavinski’s ethnic identity to garner support from Denieff is somewhat equivalent to Spivak’s claim of how strategic essentialism is a “use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak 205). But this strategic use is a cunning one in that Pellerin voices an assumption that was never enunciated or made apparent before. This situation can be understood as demonstrating how essentialism is very frequently used for an ‘ends justify the means’ situation. Which would appear to be the case in Sarto’s strategy, as well as many of the other textual instances dramatizing characters that employ a strategic usage of essentialism.

The ideal of social progress is inherent in both concepts and strategies of the counter-hegemonic bloc and strategic essentialism. But as the aforenoted textual examples demonstrate, battles for social progress are not simply about overcoming dualistic challenges. Richler’s dramatizations of essentialism can be understood as demonstrating textual ambivalences towards the essentialist, dualistic binaries between the Jews and Gentiles that are fictionalized in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. Even in the example cited above from ‘Pinky’s Squealer’, which, it can be argued, is perhaps an ironic, positive example of strategic essentialism, still implicitly demonstrates
the negative aspect, the stereotype. This is evident through the emphasis upon the
caracter's nose that allows the character to appear Gentile, which therefore negatively
implies that all Jews have a large nose. Bessette also demonstrates how strategic
essentialism can fall into the realm of stereotype and in its most positive, textual
imagining (getting Denieff to support the union) is predicated upon a lie or at the very
least an assumption.

The dramatization of essentialism, as played out in the primary texts, nullifies
difference, legitimizes deceit and ossifies identity into a rigid, circumscribed
representation. One might say that this can be said to explain Spivak's cautious,
ambivalence towards such a strategy: "a strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a
theory" (Morton 75). This is an ambivalence that, I believe, is also portrayed through the
comic-satiric cultural work of the selected texts. The counter-hegemonic bloc also has an
inherent sense of ambivalence or indeterminateness imbued in it through its constant
negotiation of and vacillation around identity that can be said to open up a Third Space
which, "display[s] the hybrid moment of political [or social] change" (Bhabha 41).

However, this idealistic function, as is discussed throughout this chapter, is often
undermined by other discourses largely associated with identity. The union leaders from
Les pédagogues, the workers from La bagarre, and the anti-communist and socialist fears
of the Jewish community in The Street all fictionalize the problems inherent in attempting
to reconstitute or re-symbolize various groups into one mass.
Conclusion

As I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this thesis, these texts demonstrate the complex, intricate and often ambivalent issues surrounding identity and identity formation. That identity and identity discourses are complex should come as no surprise when one remembers that the concept of identity is, as invoked by Hall, constructed “through, not outside, difference” and that “identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside’, abjected [etc.]. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure” (Hall 18). This has been made evident by my analyses of how many of the selected primary texts’ ideologically driven discourses demonstrate the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in essentialist notions of identity. Thus, despite the narratives’ frequent emphasis upon essentialist notions of identity and belonging the characters’ discourses and actions frequently represent an indeterminate space of identification. In other words, in the selected corpus of realist narratives examples of mimicry and hybridity often open up instances of a Third Space that challenge and contest the discourses that attempt to contain and fix identity, whether it be cultural, ethnic or class related.

Jules Lebeuf is a prime example of a character who struggles to identify himself, sometimes as a novelist/intellectual, sometimes as a working class tramway worker. He believes he can help elevate the French Canadian people in both these roles; as a tramway worker who can help his fellow employees or as an intellectual who can help the young Gisèle. For Jules each identitary discourse, however, often has consequences that undermine his attempts at each goal, as when his friend Sillery and girlfriend Margo
deride his intellectual pursuits (the former claiming at one point he is a “Socrate au cabaret” (La bagarre 26)). Similar undermining is dramatized by Bill, Gisèle’s father, who prefers that his daughter follow religious education rather than being educated with and by Anglophones, and by the co-worker who claims Jules is simply a tourist. Jules’ aforenoted attempts at identification, as Hall qualifies the term, are: “constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal” (Hall 16). However, for Lebeuf there is no absolute recognition that would allow him to be a part of accepted by each group. His determination to create sutures between the various groups is denied and undermined time and time again. The subjects of his idealistic pursuits (the tramway coworkers, Gisèle’s father) are unwilling to accept or incapable of imagining a connection between, or a shared Third Space for, their various identity groups. Ben-Zion Shek refers to La bagarre’s concluding ‘dark mood’ but according to my analyses it is the predominantly essentialist social and discursive circumstances of the competing identity groups that account for Jules’ inability to inhabit an in-between, hybrid formation of identity and hence the novel’s closing “dark mood”.

Similar instances are found in The Street, when one considers a character such as Tansky. His attempts at trying to create a counter-hegemonic bloc of his Jewish and French Canadian clientele, demonstrates, as with Jules, his desire to transgress identitary discourses and create a larger, more fluid or ambivalent, sense of community across class and ethnic lines. The narrator, throughout the various stories within the text, also demonstrates an in-between, or rather an ambivalent stance towards identification. This is evident in moments such as “The War, Chaverim, And After” when the narrator
identifies as a Canadian, but only in contrast to a Jewish teacher whom he ridicules with stereotypical insults. Such ambivalence is also demonstrated by the narrator in the story, “The Street”, when he discusses his feelings towards the French Canadian communities; one that is based on hate yet recognizes that both the Jewish and French Canadian communities were unproductively battling each other for recognition by the dominant, hegemonic, WASP community.

The dramatization of conflicts that suggest how one can possibly subvert hegemony and hegemonic groups is one of the principal elements of *Les pédagogues*. Sarto’s attempt, echoing analogous ones by Jules and Tansky, to create a counter-hegemonic group via trade-union politics demonstrates the difficulties one encounters when dealing with conservative individualists such as Lambert, who believe such counter-hegemonic machinations are too abstract, too revolutionary, and not worth pursuing. The fact that Lambert also enunciates an Orientalist discourse is not surprising given that it and his judgement of abstract thought and painting enunciates, in a variety of ways, essentialist fantasies of fixity. Nevertheless, Bessette’s satiric critique of both the bourgeois, conservative audience and the abstract expressionist painters in *Les pédagogues* allows said moments in the important cultural work of the novel to be described as Third Spaces in that their respective critiques are somewhat ambivalent.

*The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* likewise demonstrates various issues surrounding essentialist discourse and how they render Duddy Kravitz, like a Jules Lebeuf or Sarto, confused in his attempts to occupy a position amongst the contradictions of ethnic and cultural discourses that are fraught with disorientation and displacement. Duddy Kravitz’s quest to signify himself as a ‘somebody’ is mediated by various
essentialist cultural, class and ethnic discourses that hamper, and thus makes it difficult for him to materialize, his dream of becoming ‘someone’. However, this ambivalence appears to reach its denouement near the end of the novel when he deterministically chooses to follow the cunning path of an unconscionable, unscrupulous person. This satirical concluding depiction of Duddy, like many of the noted moments of satire in all of the selected texts, may imply that there is a privileged moral stance or position by the author, and that the ultimate ‘work’ of the text is for a reader to clearly interpret this stance. However, to return to Catherine Belsey’s *Critical Practice*, it is worth noting that similarly to the concepts of ambivalence and the Third Space addressed above, classic realism can – contrary to the “common sense” way of understanding it – actually be understood as “bring[ing] points of view into unresolved collision or contradiction” (Belsey 92).

Discursive attempts to contain, encompass and enclose individual and collective senses of identity are commensurate with Belsey’s above notion of a lack of narrative resolution in relation to twentieth century, realist fiction. This is also discussed by Nathalie Cooke in her article “Closure/dis-closure” found in the *Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory*. There, Cooke discusses the potential open-endednesses of what Mikhail Bakhtin called the ‘postmythic’ novel that “frustrates the formalist desire to find closure integral to the structure of the work, and the corollary assumption that texts can and do achieve closure” (Cooke 525). Cooke further elucidates how this desire occurs in regards to the modern novel, particularly in relation to specific socio-historical contexts:
Looking beyond the novel's formal structure to its ethical and socio-historical context, other critics argue that the defining feature of the 'modern' novel is not its closure but rather its open-endedness. Common to their analyses is the assumption that the novel is not closed off from but is part of its socio-political moment, and that novelistic form is not a fixed structure but rather one in 'process' (525).

Full closure, as the above critics suggest, is never achieved in relation to both identity and literary form but is always 'in process'. Cooke's claim of the “socio-historical contexts” is relevant to the signs of “open-endedness” of the selected texts; particularly how the ways such “contexts” are embedded in the texts and necessitates how these characters' attempts at hybrid identities and counter-hegemonic alliances (i.e. Lebeuf and Sarto's revolutionary desires, Duddy's hybrid Jewish and secular drives, Tansky's in-betweeness) are incomplete and only represented as being “in process”.

Finally, I believe that my underlining of the importance of these texts in terms of their levels of ambivalence and indeterminateness does not idealize a perpetual absence of meaning, but rather allows us to focus on the often ignored and underlying elements that historically, socially, culturally and politically have contested and challenged the limitations of identitary discourse and possibly literary form. As I hope has been made evident in this thesis, the significant cultural work of these texts is made manifest through the complex problematization of essentialist, often ethnocentric, discourses and that, though previous critical attention has focused on the comic, satiric and sometimes polemic elements of these texts in relation to class, culture and ethnic identity, these texts enunciate more complex and ambivalent positions on identity than has generally been recognized.
Works Cited


Endnotes

1 In “The Realist Novel: The European Context”, F.W.J. Hemmings claims that “Since the realistic mode affected almost every aspect of prose fiction, it is difficult even today to reduce it to a simple, all-encompassing formula” (Hemmings 554). In his essay, Hemmings discusses the realist novel in the late 19th century but I believe his concerns are equally true when one attempts to provide an all-encompassing definition for the realist mode of the 20th century. That being said, I defer to Hemmings’ claim that one clear element in the realist novel is the “keen interest they showed in the broader political and social developments” (554) and I believe this, coupled with my above consideration of Belsey’s definition, can allow for my primary texts to be considered realist.

2 God’s Little Acre is referred to (and recommended) by Duddy multiple times throughout the text. God’s Little Acre, published in 1933 is a novel by Erskine Caldwell that was nearly censored in the United States because of its sexual content, hence Duddy’s recommendation, particularly when he states: “that’s the horniest [book]” (Apprenticeship 65). But the book has also been noted for its implicit socialist-identified content in how it dramatizes the plight of workers deprived of union protection as well as its depiction of the character Will Thompson who tries to fight for the workers at his mill and who is shot dead by security guards while trying to reopen the mill which was shut down by its merciless owners.


3 In La Création de Gérard Bessette, Réjean Robidoux, discussing Les pédagogues, states: “Ce qui me paraît évident par ailleurs dans l’intentionnalité créatrice de l’auteur, à cause censément de l’allègre exercice de style, c’est la primauté de l’aspect fiction sur ce qu’on peut appeler un thèse politico-sociale, qui est tout de même encore là” (Robidoux 152). Shek also acknowledges the socio-political aspects of Les pédagogues, stating how the novel “conclude[s] on a note of optimism […] sounding the death-knell of the Duplessis regime. Also, the critique of the educational system […] heralds the reforms that were to come with the Quiet Revolution” (Shek 235)

4 I use the term quasi-autobiographical, because as I address later, to my knowledge there is no proof from Richler or otherwise that these stories are autobiographical. In his Introduction to The Street, Richler himself states that “Most of the stories I have ever published are included in this collection – a mixed bag, for it is also larded with a number of quasi-autobiographical memoirs, some journalism and vignettes” (Richler 5)


I am influenced by how Graham Huggan interprets the term postcolonialism, particularly in reference to his claim that Bhabha “turns ‘the postcolonial’ into a kind of floating signifier for contemporary resistance to hegemonic forms of social and political authority” (Huggan 237).

In Chapter 1, I will also briefly be invoking Anne McClintock and her text *Imperial Leather*

This spelling of Thirdspace by Soja, differs from Bhabha’s Third Space.

Discussing ‘thirding-as-Othering’, Soja states: “Stated differently, asserting the third-as-Other begins an expanding chain of heuristic disruptions, strengthening defenses against totalizing closure and all ‘permanent constructions’. Each thirding and each trialectic is thus an ‘approximation’ that builds cumulatively on earlier approximations, producing a certain practical continuity of knowledge production that is an antidote to the hyperrelativism and ‘anything goes’ philosophy associated with such radical epistemological openness. The ‘third’ term – and Thirdspace as a concept – is not sanctified in and of itself. The critique is not meant to stop at three [...] but to build further, to move on, to continuously expand the production of knowledge beyond what is presently known” (Soja 61).

The abstract expressionist painters in Québec durin this time were often known as automatistes.


It is important to note that another teacher in the novel, Hubert Sigouin, who is professor of psychology, has employed a type of abstract, psychological method in his classroom. When Joyal asks Lambert about Sigouin, Lambert’s response is: “Sigouin! Ne me parlez pas de cet escogriffe! [...] le dénommé Sigouin avait conçu le projet génial de compiler ‘scientifiquement’ des enfants de nos écoles [...] Sa méthode? Très simple! Il suffisait d’y penser. Il donnait à chaque écolier une feuille blanche et lui demandait d’écrire au hasard tous les mots qui lui passaient par tête. On pouvait s’imaginer les graphiques et les tableaux savants, ‘scientifiques’ que pareille méthode allait engendrer. Jusqu’à là, ça ne semblait pas tirer à conséquence: on aurait pu se contenter d’en rire. Mais, le plus tragique, c’est que bon nombre de gogos s’y laissaient prendre” (Pédagogues 68)

Though *Les pédagogues* may be said, particularly in light of this scene, to valorize cultural and artistic hybridity, it would be worthwhile to note that the text does not seem to achieve this on the level of form as its narrative structure is quite conventional, despite Bessette’s later texts that use more of a stream of conscious style of narrative.

Duddy’s name carries with it particular Jewish significance in that it is Yiddish for David, who, according to the Hebrew Bible, is referred to as the King of the Jews

Schwartzes is a Yiddish term that means ‘blacks’. For the narrator to claim that French Canadians were ‘our blacks’ is quite significant and I feel should be acknowledged.

I do recognize that there is more than one function of the ‘foreignization’ of words (i.e. as a sign of authenticity or realism; as an alienation technique; in order to create an enigma) and though I cannot say with complete assurance which one is Richler’s intention, I do believe one way of interpreting his usage is understanding it as a metonymic gap.
17 The signification of Litvaks, particularly in regards to the story ‘Pinky’s Squealer’ will be discussed in the next chapter.

18 A pusherke is a pejorative term for someone who is pushy and competitive.

19 That being said, I cannot help to think a successful example of the former is the website entitled ‘Every Goy’s Guide to Richler: Yiddish Phrases & Jewish Cultural References in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz’ (http://theorem.ca/~mvcorks/yiddish.html). This site invites readers to translate and post Yiddish words and expressions found in the novel. This can be understood to serve as a Third Space in that it provides a space where distinct cultures can enunciate and exchange meaning between readers which may deepen their understanding of the text as well as the various cultural communities.

20 My use of ‘performativity’ throughout this thesis is inspired by Judith Butler from her texts Gender Trouble (1990) and Bodies That Matter (1993), particularly in the latter where she states “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler 2).

21 The Labour Progressive Party was the political organization of the Communist Party of Canada between 1943-1959.


23 In Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe discuss the various ways hegemony is implicated in Marxist and Socialist theorization: “The guiding thread of our analysis has been the transformations in the concept of hegemony, considered as a discursive surface and fundamental nodal point of Marxist political theorization” (Laclau and Mouffe 3).

24 It should be noted that Lebeuf’s question is raised in regards to Gisèle’s education. He idealizes her as a symbolic emblem of the French Canadian people in that if he can ‘elevate’ her, the ethnic-linguistic group can be elevated as well. However, this line can also be read as symbolic for how Lebeuf himself is ‘elevated’ to the role of supervisor yet his former counter-hegemonic group of workers considers him with scorn for being promoted.

25 For some historic examples of conflicts between ethnic-identified union groups, particularly Jewish workers in Quebec, see Bernard Danserreau’s ‘La place des travailleurs juifs dans le mouvement ouvrier québécois au début du XXe siècle’ in Juifs et Canadiens Français Dans La Société Québécoise (2000)

26 Given the extent Bhabha borrows form psychoanalytic theorists (particularly Jacques Lacan), it would seem that his term ‘daemonic repetition’ is borrowed from Freud’s The Uncanny (whom he also cites later in this essay ‘The Other Question’, where my above citation originates): “In the unconscious mind we can recognize the dominance of a compulsion to repeat, which proceeds from instinctual impulses. This compulsion
probably depends on the essential nature of the drives themselves. It is strong enough to override the pleasure principle and lend a demonic character to certain aspects of mental life" (Freud 145)