

Article

Title: "The truth will out" - Mordecai Richler's Barney's Version

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Abstract(s):

Any autobiography, whether fictional or not, is fuelled by memory. It is the engine behind the writing, the sine qua non of any writing with a truth claim. But if even the sharpest memory is victim to the vanishings of time, to what extent can an autobiographer be truthful, reliable? Is it at all possible? After an examination of the link between memory and literature, as well as of the concept of reliability in fiction, the paper looks at how Mordecai Richler deals with these questions in his final novel, *Barney's Version*. In the novel Richler presents a narrator who longs to put the "true story" of his life to paper, while suffering from Alzheimer's and the limits to exactitude inherent to the disease. The result of this is a confusion of personal history, reliability, autobiography and the questioning of - and ultimately an affirmation of - whether the truth can be known.

Chaque autobiographie, qu'elle soit fictive ou non, a un besoin fort de mémoire - parce que la mémoire dirige l'acte d'écrire. C'est la condition sine qua non de tout texte élevant des prétentions à la vérité. Mais si le temps corrompt et détériore même la mémoire la plus vive, dans quelle mesure peut-on parler d'une autobiographie vraie? L'entreprise est-elle nécessairement futile? Après avoir examiné le rapport entre la mémoire et la littérature, et en scrutant tout particulièrement le rôle de l'exactitude narrative, l'article examine comment Mordecai Richler traite cette question dans son dernier roman. Avec *Barney's Version*, Richler présente un narrateur qui voudrait écrire "l'histoire vraie" de sa vie, même s'il souffre de la maladie d'Alzheimer et malgré les limites de l'exactitude inhérents à la maladie. Cette combinaison soulève des questions sur l'histoire personnelle ainsi que sur l'exactitude d'une autobiographie, et met en doute - avant de nier ce doute - le fait qu'on puisse découvrir la vérité.

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- Mordecai Richler, CC (January 27, 1931 – July 2, 2001) was a Canadian writer. His best known works are *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959) and *Barney's Version* (1997). His 1970 novel *St Urbain's Horseman* and 1989 novel *Solomon Gursky Was Here* were shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. He is also well known for the Jacob Two-Two children's fantasy series. In addition to his fiction, Richler wrote numerous essays about the Jewish community in Canada, and about Canadian and Quebec nationalism

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