

Mordecai Richler



Mordecai Richler, photo courtesy of

[The Star](#)

Montreal has produced and nurtured many Canadian writers, including, of course, Hugh MacLennan, author of *Two Solitudes* (1941).

The literary mission of [Mordecai Richler](#) (1931-2001) was to portray another solitude, the city's Jews, and that he did, with biting humour. His works earned him much recognition, including a Screenwriter's Guild award, an Oscar nomination, two Governor General's Awards, the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and the Leacock Medal for Humour. As [Christopher McCreery](#) points out, he was offered the Order of Canada three times and refused it twice, accepting it at last in 2000, not long before he died.

Sunday night at 8:00 Bravo! will air a documentary about this contrarian writer who was loved and hated, who sometimes shocked and scandalized the Montreal he portrayed with such gritty realism. The film title is [The Last of the Wild Jews](#).

The *Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, *St. Urbain's Horsemen*, and [Barney's Version](#) (film version 2010) are perhaps his most important novels. He was also a witty and incisive essayist and a writer of brilliant short stories. A great favourite of mine is the psychological tragedy "Benny, the war in Europe, and Myerson's daughter Bella."

His film and movie work also earned much praise. The short NFB film "[Mortimer Griffin and Shalinsky](#)," set in Montreal shortly after World War II, is a tragicomic portrait of a man who tries to deny his Jewish heritage. Observing the ordinary, flawed and utterly believable characters, the watcher laughs with rueful recognition and is left thinking about ethnic prejudice and the profound complexities of identity and self-definition.

I have few regrets in life, but one of them concerns Mordecai Richler. Many years ago I volunteered for the Vancouver Writers' Festival and missed a chance of picking him up at the airport. I can still imagine what a pleasure and privilege it would have been to have an hour in a car listening to this brilliant man talk.