

THE ANALYSIS OF MYTHIC ELEMENTS USED IN FIFTH BUSINESS BY ROBERTSON DAVIES

Turkan Aliyeva

Baku Engineering University, tueliyeva@beu.edu.az

ABSTRACT

Deptford trilogy is one of Robertson Davies' works that made him an outstanding Canadian writer all over the world. This trilogy essentially is a tale of a quest for self-identity. The examination and deep analysis of Davies' first novel including trilogy – "Fifth Business" provides the basis for this article. This article reviews "Fifth Business" in scope as Davies' interests and points to his origin of motivation which research the feature of goodness and wickedness, truth and illusion, myth and magic and action and result. His serious career as journalist, playwright, critic, and professor made us think that he could never appreciate the mystery and magic. The article considers "Fifth Business" with an eye to two specific aspect of myth that influenced Davies. First perspective is Davies' interest in describing myth/magic in the novel as a means by which the main character ascends to the position of divineness. Similarly, the second aspect – the influence of Karl Jung's psychoanalytic approach can't be denied.

Key words: magic, mythic elements, Canadian conscience, self – fulfillment, psychological truth, fifth business

INTRODUCTION

The first novel including to Deptford trilogy is "Fifth Business" which is a story about the protagonist's self – discovery journey full of myth, magic and history. Being brought up in Presbyterian Church, Dunstan Ramsay – the protagonist – unable to find his real identity in the objective world. The surrounding he grows up confines his spiritual growth while myth helps him to learn to grow and discover his real self. Religion, myth, and magic all together play a crucial role in Dunstan Ramsay's life and the fulfillment of him as a person through the wonder. From the beginning of the novel, disagreement between two boys and one's throwing snowball to another lead to Ramsay's feeling guilty throughout his life. Ramsay tries to realize his part as a fifth business and to release himself from the burden of guilt in different ways. Searching his self in mystery- in a magic world and analyzing saints are the best ways to attain his ambition.

1. The Role of Myth in Robertson Davies' Literary Career

How literature and myth fundamentally connected with each other has been reserched by prominent critics and theorists. The study of the mythic elements in different literary works have connected myth with literature tightly. Myth is considered a perspective through which literature can be analyzed and interpreted. The concept of myth illustrates society's core troubles. Through using myth in the novels, authors try to show how sadness can turn to happiness, anger to love, and loss of identity to quest and finding of it. Myth somehow reflects reality that people are unaware. Davies believes "*Mythical and mystical world are being connected with the present world reality*". (Bossiere, Morra, 2001) One of the outstanding myth critic E.W. Herd emphasized using mythic elements in literary works. He thinks that authors' intention of using mythic elements in their novels is different. "*Some authors use myth as a means of literary allusion, intended to attract the attention of the reader, and add significance of a theme or situation by means of illustration or parallel*".(Herd,1969) In the essay "Mythological Themes in Creative Literature and Art", Joseph Campbell indicates that "*in order to be effective, a mythology (to state the matter bluntly) must be up-to-date scientifically, based on a concept of the universe that is current, accepted and convincing*".(Campbell, 2008)

Canadian novelist, critic, playwright and professor Robertson Davies – one of the passionate readers of world literature also realized the inevitable function of myth in literature. He played an imperative role for introducing Canadian identity to the world. His three trilogies made him an outstanding writer all over the world. Robertson Davies' second trilogy – Deptford Trilogy – consists of three novels: "Fifth Business" (1970), "The Manticore"(1972), and "World of Wonders" (1975). Having great

interest in magical world of myth, Davies intentionally used titles expressing his mythic opinion for his novels. Different from the other novels, these novels somehow reflect Davies' own story, together with his interest in Jungian psychology and saints, his religious outlook and especially his love of magic. For Davies' perspective, "*myth is universal and has no boundaries, while a person's inner psyche is always aware of myth which get people together.*" To Davies, "*myths have firm traditional values, and to be treated as powerful elements in writing to evaluate, judge, and exemplify the modern world*". (Vandenburg, 2013) He gathered elements from different kinds of myth and formed a strong basis of mythic understructure for his characters. He identified myth as an invisible force of motivation, comprehension, and sense of life.

Davies himself thought of his trilogy as "*autobiographical, but not as young man to it; it will be rather as Dickens wrote David Copperfield, a fictional reworking of some things experienced and much re-arranged*". (Grant,1994) A common setting, several common characters, essential events and main plots of the novels manage to hold the "unity" of the trilogy. Dunstan Ramsay, David Staunton and Paul Dempster are common characters in the novels of the trilogy. Davies' characters are usually born as typical human being without any unusual abilities. However, step by step, they mount to a crucial position through their ambition for finding their identity and they remember people helping them on the way to achieve their goal. All main characters of the novels have their own life stories which link each other. And by analyzing these connected stories, we find the characters' common ambition for being in a mythical or magical world that exists within the borders of usual, real modern society. Besides that, Davies tried to help his characters to find their real self in Canadian society through myth. Davies attempted to throw light on this issue. Davies explained the symbolic nature of myths in a simple way opposed to his contemporaries who used complicated ways. His protagonists pass through several ways before achieving their goals:

1. Their journey starts from leaving hometown to a new world. The setting of Canadian myth requires his characters to abandon their country's physical geography in order to find their real identity.
2. On their way, they face difficulties and encounter with new people who supply them with new experiences that would rise them into a powerful and wise man position.
3. Similarly, on the way to the destination, the hero would encounter a wise man who teaches them new abilities to attain their ambition which gradually the protagonists become aware of their target.
4. In the end, after passing unescapable and highly needed dramatic changes, Davies' heroes return to their ordinary life with vast knowledge and bright experiences and they become better human beings compared to their personality before starting the journey.

First novel of the trilogy is "Fifth Business" which the central theme is the main character's journey to self- discovery that is humorous and full of mystery. Before making up his mind to write "Fifth Business", Davies had passed several stages for several years. First, in 1958, an image began to appear in Davies' mind and in 1979, he described his thought of how he decided to start writing the novel: "*(It was) a winter's night on a village street, which in time I recognized as a street I knew well from childhood . . . After a while the scene was peopled by two boys, and one was throwing a snowball, and I knew the snowball had a stone concealed in it*". (Grant,1994)

Two years later, "pretty clear" scene of the novel appeared so often in his mind that Davies recognized he had to take serious steps for writing about this event. The second imperative element for creating a novel was the moral responsibility of the children. Keeping all these things in mind, Davies was not ready enough to write the novel till the time Brenda (his wife) discovered the last element – the idea of fifth business – in opera, a person who is necessary to the plot, but not central to it. Brenda found out the term "fifth business" while participating in the opera at the home of Nicolas Goldschmidt. One of her friend described the operatic roles sung in the European opera. "*There were heroes and heroines, she said, and these, of course, were sopranos and tenors. Then there were villains and temptresses, and naturally, these were basses and contraltos. Then, she said dismissively, there was Fifth Business – the sort of roles sung by other singers whose parts were necessary to the plot, but not central to it*". (Grant,1994) In this novel, Dunstable Ramsay is described as a fifth business previously without being aware of his role in the life of others.

The novel gained a great success and was praised in most influential publications all around the world. The success the novel gained was beyond Davies' expectations. He described Canadian's first reaction to his novel by saying ". . . *in the beginning this story was not warmly received in Canada. However, when it gained very warm commendation in the United States and elsewhere, Canada changed its opinion. Many Canadians began to see in the tale of Dunstan Ramsay some relevance to themselves and to their country*". (Grant, 1994)

Various outstanding publications in North America responded the novel positively and praised it to the sky. "Fifth Business" was described as "*an elegant novel*" by The New Yorker, "*as masterfully executed as anything in the history of the novel*" (Grant, 1994) by Esquire publication, and "*a mature, accomplished and altogether remarkable book, one of the best of this or any other reason and it simply cannot be ignored*" (Grant, 1994) by The Washington Post and the Chicago Tribune. Likewise, The New York Times commented about it as "*a marvelously energetic novel . . . driven by inevitable narrative force*", (Grant, 1994) The Globe and Mail also shared the same positive thoughts about the novel. Robertson Davies was also evaluated as "*a man of surprisingly diverse accomplishment*" by his fellows and his novel is considered as "*an advance over his earlier work*".

Except influential publications, plenty of internationally famous authors also commented about "Fifth Business" positively, and considered it worth reading. The popularity of the novel made Davies a celebrity and the novel a bestseller. Some critics like Nicholas Maes and national and international reviewers consider the novel – a novel of wonder, magic, and myth. "*On the surface level, then, this is a simple story about the life of one unremarkable man, a supporting player to the stronger personalities around him. But on a deeper level, it is a complex study of several characters, full of Jungian archetypes, synchronicity, and questions about power, sexuality, love, and faith*". (Maes, 2009) In 1968, in his conversation with Gordon Roper, Davies mentioned that "*life has a strong mythic and fairy tale quality. And people don't recognize that they are living out myths or mythic patterns or archetypal situations*". (Madison, 1989)

Having vast interest in Freud and Jung's psychology, Robertson Davies tried to use the principles of their psychology to his Deptford trilogy. Jung's psychology based on human psyche which is characterized being three types: personal conscious, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious. Jung believes that collective unconscious is dominant in people's life. Davies was using myth in his novels as a way of personal unconscious to get to a mythic world in order to evoke solidarity and to encourage "collective conscious". Davies' characters tries to create roads to a common absent past through myth and by this way they fill the absence of history. Similarly, Davies describes the setting of "Fifth Business" in three milieus. Each event represents a different aspect of the psyche.

Besides trying to incorporate Freud and Jung's psychology in the novel, Davies' interest in hagiography and the mythology helped him to discover the meaning of life by identifying the ways of lives which acknowledge ancient patterns. Davies wanted to fill the world with a wonder it had lost and tried to analyze all events from the perspective of saints and mystery. For Davies, a man may gain understanding of his destiny through mythology. He thinks that "*the fear and dread and splendor and freedom of wonder have been banished from the modern world*". (Davies,1983) In Deptford trilogy, Davies managed to recharge the world with the wonders within human psyche successfully. Dunstan Ramsay tries to find his real identity, so he starts to search his real soul. On this way, he was really amazed by realizing myth and magic that he encountered, he had conversations with different people about saints. Trying to understand all the things happened to him, he explores illusion and reality. In the end, after sleeping with the devil, he realizes his existence and finds his true self. In addition to the influence of myth in the current situations, Davies would like to draw readers' attention to the importance of the past than present. Each character in the novel is overwhelmed with the burden of the past.

2. Dunstan Ramsay as a Fifth Business in the Novel

Dunstan Ramsay – the protagonist of the novel – narrates the story. In spite of his role in the lives of all other characters, he managed to remain in the background as a passive observer. Thanks to him, we acquainted with other key characters – Boy Staunton (the boy who threw the snowball with the stone), Paul Dempster (Mary's premature son), Mary Dempster (the pregnant woman whom the snowball hit mistakenly), and Liesl (a woman who helps Dunstan to find his real identity). Ramsay comprehends that he is "fifth business" in the drama of his life. Working as a history teacher, Dunstan analyzes history through the magical world of myth. He exclaims: "*the oddly recurrent themes of history, which are also the themes of myth*". (Davies,2015) Ramsay thinks that there is inevitable bond between history and myth. In his book, *The Saints: A Study in History and Popular Mythology*, Ramsay indicates: "*In my book, I wanted to explore first of all why people needed saints, and then how much their need had to do with the saintly attachments of a wide range of extraordinary and gifted people*". (Davies,2015) Although the novel can be considered a chronology of 60 years in Dunstan's life, in fact, it can be considered as a union and study of several perspectives like Jungian archetypes and questions about myth, magic, and faith. Having a complex plot, "Fifth Business" was called "*a work of theological fiction that approaches Graham Greene at the top of his form*". (Grant,1994) In "Fifth Business", Dunstan Ramsay is unaware of ending his life long journey. However, his interest in saints and magic triggers Dunstan Ramsay to go for his desire in spite of passing beyond human limitation. He starts his self- discovery journey as a soldier who sacrifices his life for his nation, and then he becomes the level of a history teacher and finally he proves himself as a mythographer and becomes a mythic hero. Ramsay considers myth and history as two parts of human destiny which the former is recorded, while the latter is abstract. Dunstan Ramsay attempts to describe human nature in the light of myth and hagiography: "*In the study of hagiography we have legends and all those splendid pictures of saints who killed dragons, and it doesn't take much penetration to know that the dragons represent not simply evil in the world but their personal evil, as well. Of course, being saints, they are said to have killed their dragons, but we know that dragons are not killed; at best they are tamed and kept on the chain*". (Davies,2015)

The novel was analyzed from different perspectives on different grounds like reflecting Canadian society, being spiritual autobiography or a myth of Canadian's struggle for finding real identity, and even describing the theme of guilt. The moral of the novel is – no action is without consequences. Davies tried to show the results of the snowballing from the perspectives of three main characters of the novels who were greatly affected.

One of the main leading theme of the novel is the sense of guilt. The struggle between two boys on the sled leads Boyd's throwing a stone hidden in a snowball at Dunstan. The snowball unexpectedly hits Mary Dempster in the head and causes the birth of her premature son, Paul who struggles for life. It has really bad results for Mrs. Dempster like permanently losing her reason and becoming eccentric in her behavior and indiscriminating in her generosity; therefore, she is called "a fool saint" by Roman Catholic Priest. Overwhelmed with this guilt for the rest of his life, Dunstan feels responsible for Mary (Mrs. Dempster), and her son Paul because of being "*a Presbyterian child and he knows a good deal about damnation*". (Davies,2015) When Paul is four years old, he takes care of him, and he entertains him with card tricks learned from a pretty book about magic named "A Child's Book of Saints" by William Canton. However, Paul's father –Amasa Dempster, a Baptist parson scolds Ramsay for teaching his son saints and card tricks. Ramsay does not consider himself guilty, for the stories of saints are "*tales of wonder, full of mysticism and beauty*". (Davies,2015) However, the main guilty character, Boyd refuses to acquire his responsibility for Mrs. Dempster's condition. In the end, Boy Staunton was found dead, a stone in his mouth. "Who kills Boy?" is the question that leads to deeper understanding of the world of wonder and myth.

Having a strong sense of decency, Dunstan tries to fulfill his responsibility towards Mrs. Dempster and Paul throughout all his life. Dunstan is raised as a Presbyterian, but he takes his interest in Catholic saints. For Dunstan Ramsay, "*religion and morality are immediate certainties in life, and the events of the novel show how moral lapses have a way "snowballing" and coming back to haunt one*". (Davies,1983) He tries to develop advanced spiritual mode of life which is not reliant on external

structure. Dunstan thinks that his religion limits his creative soul and doesn't let his spirit grow. Therefore, he finds out that magic and more mythical approach to history can help a person to find his real identity. He comes up to this conclusion after his being preoccupied with the lives of the Saints for a while. His stories always had fantastic nature and at the same time they were always based on actual events.

Another myth about Ramsay is "transmutation" – "*a profound basic change in the essential nature of the individual*". (Jung,1970) He changes his name from Dunstable to Dunstan which has a close connection with a Christian myth after being rewarded for his heroic act in World War I on Diana Harfleet's (English nurse) desire. "*St. Dunstan was a marvelous person and very much like you – mad about learning, terribly stiff and stern and scowl, and an absolute wizard at withstanding temptation. Do you know that the Devil once came to tempt him in the form of a fascinating woman, and he caught her nose in his goldsmith's tongs and gave it a terrible twist?*" (Davies,1983) As Diana gives detailed explanation of the myth of his new name, Dunstan realizes the mythical label of himself and new personality and freedom his new name suggests. And Ramsay's mythical journey starts from this point.

3. Mary Dempster as Dunstan's Fool Saint

In Dunstan's mythological world, Mary Dempster is Ramsay's fool saint. After the incident of snowballing, Mrs.Dempster acts awkwardly around and loses her reason. As Dunstan blames himself for everything happened to Mary, he supports her in public which causes his being ignored by his peers. By this way, his sense of isolation increases and "*he is being forced out of the world (he belongs) into the strange and unchancy world of Dempster's*". (Davies, 2015) Mary Dempster makes Ramsay feel good and triggers his dream to make her a saint and it is Mary who helps him to start his quest for saint knowledge. Mary attributes three miracles which lead Ramsay's accepting her as a saint. The first miracle is that a tramp is reformed after copulation with Mary Dempster. Mrs.Dempster willingly breaks the rigid rules in Deptford, so Dunstan is not allowed to visit her any more. However, Dunstan keeps visiting Mary as her experience helps him to comprehend the nature of life lived in mythic world.

Being kept in a house with no friends, Mary seems to "*live in a world of trust that had nothing of the stricken, lifeless, unreal quality of religion about it*". (Davies,2015) In spite of knowing her reputation in Deptford, Mrs. Dempster feels no humiliation. Indeed, she lives by a desire and a light arose from inside. After a while, she performs her second miracle by rebirthing Dunstan's brother Willie from the death.

Unable to be away from Mary, Dunstan chooses to join the army. Before going to the war, she advises him not to be afraid of anything which this advice later turns Ramsay's lifelong motto not only during the war, but also while struggling with his Devil. Mrs. Dempster was third shown to Ramsay as a saint when he is in the World War in a battlefield. He saw Mrs. Dempster's appearance on a Statue of Virgin and Child. The miracle Ramsay attributes is when he recovers after getting serious injury in a war from a coma lasting five months. He thinks he is treated in a protected area guided by the Madonna with Mrs. Dempster's face.

Dunstan regards holy characters as archetypes of universal figures of tales. As a result of his interest in hagiography, Ramsay starts writing popular books about saints and articles on saints' lives in adulthood. Ramsay finds the lives of saints as a way of escaping his parents' strict religious rules and a pure channel of love. The "*mystical aspects of religion to which [Dunstan] is exposed here provide a counterbalance to the starkly intellectual perceptions of right and wrong to which he is accustomed through his Presbyterian upbringing with its severe unemotional empiricism, which rejects any notion of spirituality of the mystical*". (Quigley,1991) He had several conversations with some priests about saints. The concept of saint was first introduced to Ramsay by Father Regan, a local Catholic priest in Deptford. Father Regan stimulates Ramsay's feeling to Mary Dempster and tells him: "*If you think her a saint, she is a saint to you. What more do you ask? That is what we call the reality of the soul; you are foolish to demand the agreement of the world as well*". (Davies,2015) After that, Ramsay realizes

that Mrs. Dempster acts like a saint because he can witness three miracles performed by her. On the other hand, Father Regan rejects Dunstan's thought about Mary Dempster as a special woman or a saint. He gives reasonable causes of not considering her actions like reforming tramps or saving Dunstan's brother from death, miracles and recommends Dunstan to get away this foolish notion and stop flirting with Mother Church. However, Ramsay becomes more willing to be in connection with his lovely saint, Mary Dempster. Mrs. Dempster plays several roles in Dunstan's life. She acts as a personal saint to Ramsay, and her role in the private mythology of Ramsay is lover. The distinguishing trait of Ramsay is that he prefers to evaluate a person through his/her positive side rather than negative sides. Therefore, while the rest of the people consider Mrs. Dempster a whore, Dunstan Ramsay thinks about her as a saint. In fact, he devotes all his life success to Mary Dempster as he has always been motivated by her.

4. The Role of Padre Blazon on Dunstan's Mythic Quest for Self-Identity

Another important figure in the novel is Padre Blazon who plays a crucial role in Dunstan's self-discovery journey. Ramsay first meets with a Bollandist monk - Padre Blazon as a member of Societe des Bollandists. He does not think speaking about saints is sinful, for "*it is faith! It is love! It takes the saint to the heart by supplying the other side of his character that history or legend has suppressed – that he may very well have suppressed himself in his struggle toward sainthood*". (Davies, 2015) Opposite to Father Regan's thought, Blazon tries to "*link the wisdom of the body with the wisdom of the spirit until the two are one*", Blazon forces Dunstan to "*try to understand the subtlety, and stop whimpering about the cruelty, for the torture of the spirit does not lead to wisdom.*" (Davies, 2015) After that, Ramsay starts to analyze his relationship with Mary Dempster and tries to realize how important she is in his personal mythology. By Blazon's help, Dunstan learns that he cannot find the answer to his questions in objective world, without searching in psychological truth.

While meeting Blazon again after several years, he confirms that having his fool saint and believing in miracles illuminated Dunstan's life and decorated it with beauty and goodness. Thanks to Padre Blazon, Dunstan realizes the dualistic nature of the world and the person and tries to help Boy Staunton. In spite of his struggle to help Boyd Staunton to take the responsibility of his act, he does not succeed.

Liesl is one of the main characters in the novel who helps Dunstan to unload the burden he has carried throughout his life. Liesl explains Dunstan that his love to Mary Dempster and considering her as a saint is due to his despise everyone else. Having conversations with Liesl functions as mirrors, and Dunstan sees that he is like a "little boy" whose "*bottled-up feelings have burst their bottle and splashed glass and acid everywhere*". (Davies, 2015) Finally, he understands that the cruelty of life can be endured as there is a compromise for everyone. On the other hand, Dunstan has to face unlive part of his life, for "*there is a whole great piece of [his] life that is unlive, denied, set aside*". (Davies, 2015) Now Dunstan is able to answer all the question Liesl asks, "*Who are you? Where do you fit into poetry and myth? Do you know who I think you are, Ramsay? I think you are Fifth Business,*" *the one who knows the secret of the hero's birth and whose career often outlasts the golden voices*". (Davies, 2015)

5. Boy Staunton

Despite detailed information about Ramsay's life, Boyd Staunton can be considered as a dominant figure in the novel. He is a figure of power, wealth, and control. His success story is full version of Canadian myth. Boyd Staunton simply demonstrates the universal belief that a little investment, courage, ability to analyze situation and the right circumstance can help anyone to ascend to the point where huge amount of income is earned. Seemingly, the myth of upwardly mobile self-made man who moves from poverty to riches is mostly assimilated in Canada, an under-populated colony with plenty of immigrants from Europe. An integral part of this myth is the quest of everlasting youth. Like Ramsay, he also changes his name from Percy Boyd Staunton to Boy Staunton during World War I. As he summed up himself glory of youth, he considers Boy Staunton suits him admirably. The desire of being permanently young becomes an unobtainable goal for Boyd Staunton, however, this causes his self-destruction and ironic self-fulfillment. His period of self – evaluation takes a long time and

says: “*I feel like Lazarus licked by the dogs*” (Davies,2015) The comparison between him and mythical image of Lazarus taught a lot of things about life. He tries to act like a forever energetic business tycoon, so Ramsay criticizes his shortcomings at home. Finally, his lack of responsibility and unwillingness to face old age drive Boyd to commit suicide. Therefore, his tale becomes the first version of novel’s central myth. After taking long physical and spiritual journey to achieve their knowledge and to find their inner true self, Davies’ characters learn how to observe and evaluate things. In the novel, while Boy Staunton tries to attain the high position in society throughout his journey, Dunstan struggles to find out life’s complexities.

SUMMARY

In his novel “Fifth Business”, Davies illustrates myth as a transmitter for characters’ finding their true self. Particularly, from Dunstan Ramsay’s perspective, myth depicts all the character types, situations, and actions. Although the reason of Boy’s death and Dunstan’s part in this death is unclear in the novel, Ramsay blames himself for everything happened. Dunstan identifies that “*not only do myths have contemporary relevance, but those who recognize their depiction of deep psychological patterns gain a measure of insight and control over their lives as a result*” (Davies, 1983)

The novel also illustrates Davies’ belief about great power of good and evil and their influence on human life. He expresses his idea with the help of Dunstan by showing his conviction to saintliness of Mary Dempster and her miracle acts. Even in the end, Ramsay achieves his self – knowledge with the help of Devil. Ramsay’s mythical exploration to learn saints help him to raise Mary Dempster from a usual human being to sainthood. Dunstan Ramsay is completely unaware of existence of saints as a Presbyterian, but his zeal for exploring them drives him to be successful in this mission.

The division between Canada’s physical reality and the conscious of its immigrants is a basic characteristic of Jungian and mythological structure of the novel. The novel proves Canadians’ inability to connect their country with the land around them. This situation can be compared with Ramsay’s quest for sainthood. His quest for sainthood also causes a division within him when he tries to define the goodness which is incapable of countering evil. Thus, the setting of Canadian myth requires his characters to abandon their country’s physical geography in order to find their real identity. Ramsay in Fifth Business like other characters in the trilogy finds his true self when he moves to Europe across psychological landscape. For understanding Canadian’s consciousness and finding their real identity, analyzing Canadian myth is really imperative.

Davies gradually passes the authority of finding the secrets of myth from Dunstan to Dr. von Haller, who in “The Manticore” tries to analyze and interpret the myth of the stone (hidden in the snowball) in the light of Jungian psychology.

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