LYNNE DIAMOND-NIGH

ROBERTSON DAVIES
LIFE, WORK, AND CRITICISM

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I. BIOGRAPHY

When Robertson Davies became Master of Massey College in the early 1960s, he was asked to find a suitable quotation to adorn the new institution's dining hall; the quotation that he chose serves as a foundation to understanding his life and works, as well as encapsulating what he hoped to achieve at the college. He linked two passages by Santayana to come up with the following: "Happiness is impossible, and even inconceivable, to a mind without scope, and without pause, a mind driven by craving, pleasure or fear. To be happy, you must be reasonable, or you must be tamed. You must have taken the measure of your powers, tasted the fruits of your passion, and learned your place in the world and what things in it can really serve you. To be happy you must be wise." Another building, the chapel, was considered by Davies to embody the search for self-knowledge, a quest that he asserted always ran parallel to the quest for the divine. Judith Skelton Grant, author of a recent biography, *Robertson Davies: Man of Myth* (1994), quotes the author from an interview he gave just before he became Master: "Life is a sort of lonely pilgrimage . . . in search of God. . . . I think that the way the pilgrimage is made is by attempting to acquire self-knowledge . . . and that by gaining knowledge of oneself and indirectly of other people, you gain some apprehension of some aspects of God" (417).

Such knowledge of self, with its concomitant ascent toward the divine, is a more explicit quest in Davies's life and works than it is with most artists. Nonetheless, he has always believed that a person's essence, however maturely grasped within, can never be authentically captured and conveyed to others by means of biography, but must await a fictional rendition to be justly perceived. Such must be the caveat with which even so much as a sketch of his life must begin.

William Robertson Davies was born in 1913 in a small village in southwestern Ontario, Canada, called Thamesville, which would eventually be transmuted into the root scene of his most well known and acclaimed novel, *Fifth Business* (1970). He spent six years there, during which time important influences and ideas shaped his conscious and unconscious life, remaining with him until his death. The important, ineluctable and ambiguous relationships that exist within a family were first impressed on him at that time, relationships that not only comprised the present familial unit, but reached far back (and, by extension, forward) to the family's spreading histories. His parents' ancestors, from Scots, Welsh, and Canadian pioneer stock, were living presences that colored the daily life and development of the Davies household, that would eventually find their way as dominant players into Davies's late novel, *Murther and Walking Spirits* (1991).

Davies observed that stories were a key to understanding not only his family but himself. In his family, storytelling was a venerable, persistently practiced tradition, its oral nuances carefully honed. His father Rupert's family stories, his ghost stories, and his stories steeped in myth, formed and underlined Davies's propensity for sound and rhythm, and perhaps his great, lifelong love of the theater itself. In fact, he regularly told himself stories in bed until he began to write in earnest when he was 18: the only rule was that these stories were something "that could happen." As a correlative to this oral tradition, Davies's parents emphasized the art of conversation, focusing not only on the content, but on the proper

use of grammar, syntax, tone, and the astute use of the *only* correct word. Rupert's work supported this: as the owner and editor of the local newspaper, the *Herald;* he was an active participant in village life, and spoke often to his family about the things he had heard and seen. His meticulous observations and information were passed on to his son, Robertson, who later would make use of these descriptions, details, and insights to turn his sometimes outlandish fictional settings into credible arenas of action.

With Florence, Robertson's mother, Davies endured a tortured relationship throughout his entire life. It even went so far as to manifest itself in dreams, visions, and visitations in which she often appeared as the Medusa who turned him into stone, or as a malevolent spirit who wanted to claim his life; indeed, she appears transmuted into Mrs. Bridgetower of the Salterton trilogy as such a malevolent, vengeful matriarch. Davies felt she did not love him, although she did not neglect him, and mused in Judith Skelton Grant's *Man of Myth*: "But I sometimes wondered if my fearful and life-denying mother hated me in the womb and marked me for life? . . . Sometimes I think this early struggle is the key to my character, both its strength and weakness, and its sudden descents into despair" (47-48). He had two older brothers, Fred, born in 1902, and Arthur, born the year after. Although he got on relatively well with Arthur, he was never able to establish an amicable relationship with Fred.

Besides the vagaries of his family life, often marked by dissension and acrid exchanges between his parents, three of Florence's and Rupert's shared abiding interests were transmitted to and became lifelong passions of Davies: the theater, music, and the primacy and love of knowledge. When he was six, the family moved to Renfrew, where Rupert bought and assumed the editorship of another paper, the *Renfrew Mercury*. This city, reeking of what Davies has called "bleak, malignant ignorance," would be darkly incarnated in another Davies novel, *What's Bred in the Bone* (1985). The family lived there for six years, unable to form significant attachments or breach the closed nature of the community. Davies, in particular, suffered from the bigoted and often cruel atmosphere of the schools there, and dates his dislike of the common or uncivilized man, "the common boy writ large" (*Myth* 68), from that time. Davies's elitism, for which he was often taken to task, was to a large extent the result of his seeing and experiencing the viciousness of uneducated and provincial people towards those either not of their milieu or in some way different from them. A particularly tragic and poignant episode involving the suicide of an abused Renfrew dwarf later finds its way into *What's Bred in the Bone.*

On the other side, however, several epiphanic experiences marked Davies's Renfrew years. One was a Chautauqua tent production of Verdi's opera *Rigoletto*: although he had been falling more and more under the spell of the transformative magic of the theater, it was this production that led him to apprehend the teaming life under the veil of everyday reality, a life to which he wanted access. For Davies the theater was always to embody the element of illusion in life, as well as serving as the jumping-off point for his belief in the crucial importance of the arts in the shaping of personal and national identity. These intuitions, which would later blossom into Davies's Jungian-based beliefs in the collective unconscious, the role of artistic creation, and the importance of the invisible world, were buttressed by a vision he had also during his Renfrew years, which he would be able to identify later as the *Unus Mundus*, the wholeness of the world. Other crucial events included the reading of Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*, and a trip with Rupert

and the Canadian Weekly Newspaper Association to England, Belgium, and France, that opened up an expansive new cultural and intellectual universe to the young man.

In 1925, Rupert bought another newspaper (that would later become the amalgamated *Kingston Whig-Standard*), and moved the family to Kingston, the university town that is home to Queen's University. It would be a much more gracious and hospitable city than Renfrew ever was to the family. Davies's play *Fortune, My Foe* (1949), and the novels comprising the Salterton trilogy, rely substantially on Kingston as the inspiration for many of their settings and characters. His brothers went to work for their father, and Davies started attending Upper Canada College (1928-1931), where he began writing seriously, and where he was blessed with several masters, including the headmaster of the institution, who understood his extraordinary capabilities and intellect, and gave him adult companionship and work far beyond the scope of a traditional curriculum. At the College, he was seen by the other students as a brilliant but eccentric student, a *poseur* adorned with dramatic costumes and adroitly witty, and a truly fine writer, editor, and actor as well. It was during his time there that theater assumed a prime importance in his life: he enjoyed successes as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, as well as in roles in Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, and from these successes began to envision an acting career in England. He also started a theater diary that he would continue in varying forms throughout his life, as well as a very substantial book collection that now holds many rare and out-of-print plays.

Because of his total lack of mathematical ability, a trait that he shared with Carl Jung (Davies scored "0" twice on mathematics entrance exams), he was unable to matriculate at Queen's. Nonetheless, he was allowed to attend as a special student, which he did from 1932-1935, although he was not allowed to earn a degree. He maintained his interest in theater and writing, and during this time fell desperately in love with a young woman named Eleanor Sweezy. Their relationship was still unresolved when Davies left for England and Oxford University in 1935.

For Davies, Oxford afforded a highly congenial atmosphere that nourished his love of theater, literature, and life, and allowed him to fully play out the various youthful personae that he embodied. He was a frequent theatergoer, and joined OUDS, the Oxford University Dramatic Society. That society collaborated with professionals from London, thereby creating a network that would be invaluable in later years for theater students. Davies worked there as a stage manager, writer, and actor, and again played the part of Malvolio, this time with a brilliance that earned him favorable recognition from many including his professional London colleagues.

During his first year at Oxford, however, he suffered a depression and breakdown caused most apparently by the end of his relationship with Eleanor. This was not, however, the only cause, as he came to see during ensuing psychoanalysis: unhappiness with the course of his studies and problems from his parental and sibling relationships had long been troubling him, most specifically the "fake gratitude" he was forced to express to his mother. The psychoanalysis was successful, and deepened Davies's serious lifelong interest in psychology, which had began with his discovery of Freud, and which would later veer towards Jung. It was also as a result of his breakdown that Davies developed his philosophy of marriage, one based not primarily on passion and erotic love, but on a moderating atmosphere of tenderness, friendship, compassion, and shared interests.

His academic life also benefited, for he received permission to study for a B. Litt. degree in literature, work that was far more congenial and challenging to him than what he had done before. Indeed, Judith Skelton Grant says that Davies was prouder of this degree than any other academic honor he ever received, except the honorary D. Litt. that Oxford conferred on him in 1991. His 1938 thesis, *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*, was published the following year, and has always been considered an original and highly perceptive text.

Shortly after his graduation, Davies was contacted by Sir Tyrone Guthrie of London's Old Vic, who had met him through his connection with OUDS. Guthrie offered him a one-year contract at the Old Vic in the capacity of actor, researcher, writer, and teacher; a second contract followed the year after, this time with the additional opportunity of learning how to direct. At the Old Vic, Davies's ambition to become an actor modulated into a desire to become a playwright. It was also at the Old Vic that he met the Australian Brenda Newbold, Guthrie's assistant stage manager, who had dreams of founding a theater in her country. The two found they had much in common, including, critically enough, a similar attitude to marriage, and in February 1940 they wed. One month later, they sailed for Canada, casualties of a war that had shut down London theater. Their former dreams-he to become an actor or playwright in London, she to found a theater in Australia-were relinquished.

From this time forward, Davies pursued various, always overlapping professions in Canada: editor, journalist, playwright, professor, director, novelist, among others. He began a long-standing daily routine that consisted of three work periods a day, with the evening reserved for his own writing. In 1940 he inaugurated the satiric Samuel Marchbanks column for his father's paper, the *Peterborough Examiner*, a column that would continue until 1953, and which would later be collected in several volumes: *The Diary of Samuel Marchbanks* (1947), *The Table Talk of Samuel Marchbanks* (1949), and *Marchbanks' Almanack* (1967). Upon his return to Canada as well, he became the literary editor of *Saturday Night*, that country's leading weekly opinion journal, for which he also occasionally wrote theater and music reviews.

In 1942, Rupert asked Davies to take over the editorship of the *Examiner*. It was his belief that since his son was going to inherit the gains from it, he should be part of the paper's growth and success. So, despite their desire to remain in Toronto, Brenda and Davies moved to Peterborough, where they would remain until Davies returned to Toronto to head Massey College in 1963. He was an old-style editor, believing that a newspaper should be an integral part of its community, and that the editor should take on the role of "teacher, expert and counsellor" (*Myth* 247). The paper prospered, due in large part to the success of the Marchbanks column and its own widening scope. Davies thought that even a local newspaper should focus on important international events and currents, that it should cover all kinds of news and not only that which was of a local interest and directly pertinent to its clientele. Fitted to these broader objectives, the *Examiner* gained a wider and wider following, and Davies himself was often approached by other papers that wanted to hire him. At the same time, he left the declining *Saturday Night* to write a column for the *Star*, called "A Writer's Diary"; this column too was a great success, and was syndicated throughout Canada.

During the decade of the '40s, Davies worked in the theater as well as journalism. He wrote, acted in, and directed a substantial number of plays, many of which won prestigious contests and were produced throughout Canada. He and

Brenda were involved extensively with the local community theater, and both of them taught theater classes at the YMCA. Indeed, by 1950, Davies was a major force in regional and national Canadian theater through his diverse talents, winning awards for direction, and having seen several of his plays published, many of which dealt with the theme of Canadian identity (*Overlaid*; *Eros at Breakfast*; *Fortune, My Foe*). In 1950 the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, commonly known as the Massey Commission, asked him to write a report on the state of theater in Canada. His report enumerated numerous shortcomings that would need to be overcome before Canada could begin to enjoy the quality of theater available in England. Davies addressed many of these problems in his plays, as well as in his later novels: the unfamiliarity of Canadians with theater classics; the lack of knowledge among teachers and critics; few professional theaters and lack of work for professionals during the winter months. This devotion to the theater and diagnosis of its shortcomings in Canada largely occupied Davies throughout that decade and the next, and honed his interest in and perspicacity toward the much larger problem that concerned him most of his life: the development and coming-to-maturity of Canadians and the Canadian nation.

Throughout the '50s he continued his work in the theater, and was a persuasive force in the establishment of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, on whose Board of Governors he sat from 1953 to 1971. As he knew the theater from both the business and the aesthetic angles, he was an excellent bridge between the Board and the artistic director. The festival hired Davies's former boss and friend, Sir Tyrone Guthrie, as its director, and they collaborated on several books that commemorated its first years: *Renown at Stratford*, 1953; *Twice Have the Trumpets Sounded*, 1954; and, with Tanya Moiseiwitsch and Boyd Neel, *Thrice the Brinded Cat Had Mew'd*, 1955. By the late 1940s, Davies was tiring of the difficulties and political machinations bound up in working in the Canadian theater, most particularly as a playwright, and was seriously thinking of turning to novels instead; this conviction grew throughout the 1950s, and when the theater version of his novel, *Leaven of Malice* (called *Love and Libel*), flopped opposite *Camelot* on Broadway in 1960, he definitively took leave of his profession as playwright.

During this time, Davies began to keep notebooks for ideas as well as works in progress. It was his view that ideas grew and took shape until they demanded to be written, a belief that would mesh perfectly with the Jungian notions he was to embrace in the '50s. Since his time at Oxford, he had known that the writer's art would partake of the mystical, that it would be a "distillation and alchemy" (*Myth* 185) of the unconscious. In describing the writing of *Fifth Business*, Davies explained: "The author may not know consciously every detail of his story when he begins it, but his Unconscious knows, and it is from the Unconscious that he works" (*Myth* 285). As he began to approach middle age, he found that his interest in Freud was dwindling, to be replaced by a firm conviction of the veracity of Jungian psychology, a psychology that he found less reductive and better suited to maturity. As well, Jungian inclusion of the invisible world as a real phenomenon corroborated the reality of those visitations and visions that he had experienced when young. In 1948, Davies's mother died; when he came to her house upon receiving the news, she appeared as a ferocious and malevolent apparition that wanted to destroy him, an experience that marked his entire life. It was also Freud's insistence that religion was spurious that helped to turn Davies away from him. Although never strongly orthodox in his beliefs, Davies found the cere-

monial and mythic aspects of the spiritual life engaging, necessary, and true; indeed, it was these facets of religion that had caused his conversion to Anglicanism when he was at Oxford. And like Jung he believed that "one's best creative work is an offering to God" (*Myth* 285). Two of the works he wrote during these decades revealed a strong Jungian cast, most specifically the 1958 play written for the Crest Theater, *General Confessions* (published in 1972 but never produced), and the last of the Salterton trilogy, *A Mixture of Frailties* (1958).

In 1961 Davies was approached by Vincent Massey, whom he had known since his time at Upper Canada College, both through Rupert and through Massey's sons, who were his classmates. The Massey Foundation, having elected to found the first male residential graduate school in Canada with an endowment, now wanted Davies to become Master of the College, with a complementary appointment as full professor of English. The choice of Davies was somewhat controversial, as it ignored the talent that was already in place in traditional academia, but the members of the Foundation wanted someone from outside, preferring the fresh stimulus that such a person could exert over the orthodox approach of an insider. Indeed, they saw him as the perfect choice: urbane, sophisticated, internationally known, a scholar in his own right, a successful businessman and entrepreneur, journalist, novelist, and man of the theater, who had been one of the prime movers behind its burgeoning growth in Canada. Just as important, Massey wanted the college to emulate the Princeton Institute of Advanced Studies and the colleges of Oxford (he himself had attended Balliol), and he knew that Davies's love of ceremony, tradition, the craft of witty and erudite conversation and the riches of knowledge would allow and encourage those institutional associations. In fact, Davies initiated several traditions that would continue throughout his tenure there (he resigned in 1981), such as High Table Dinners, where college fellows and outside guests would meet for stimulating conversation as well as the popular Christmas Gaudy, at which he would tell an original ghost story. These stories were later collected as *High Spirits* (1982). Davies was present during the initial stages of planning (Massey did not open until 1963), and was a guiding spirit in matters pertaining to the college's architecture; logos, and symbolic images, including quotations and crests; its structural organization; apportioning of office space, and the other myriad things that are entailed in such an enterprise. He made many important appointments of senior fellows, including those of the Canadian Northrop Frye, one of the most renowned literary critics of this century, and John Polanyi, a Nobel prize winner in chemistry. Good relations with faculty, staff, and outside associates characterized the major part of his tenure there, although there were one or two troublesome episodes with faculty, and a fairly contentious period with feminists, who targeted the predominantly all-male status of the college and did not take kindly to Davies's well-broadcast belief that men and women were essentially different. He believed that men were ruled by Logos, inclining them toward logic, rationality, and individualism, and women by Eros, inclining them toward instinct, emotion, and communication. Because of this, he felt that their ways of learning and their abilities were different, and that they should thus be educated separately. Nonetheless, it appears that female students did not feel that he was unfair to them, and in 1974 women were admitted to Massey College.

While he was Master of Massey College, Davies wrote the novels that were to gain him international acclaim. He was coming more and more under the influence of Jungian psychology, most specifically its ideas relating to religion and cre-

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ation, and he started again to pay close attention to his dreams and visions. Two important dreams occurred during the process of writing the Deptford trilogy. Since the success of the Salterton novels, his publishers had urged him to bring out a similar novel, but his psyche resisted this and in the mid-60s he had a dream that he took to be a dictum to write a book, different in nature from those comprising the first trilogy, that would evince his own deepening ideas rather than comply with others' settled expectations. Somewhat later he had another dream, that was a reprise of a much earlier dream, with this important difference: the malignant witch that had appeared in the first dream became benevolent. Davies interpreted this dream to mean that he was evolving on the path toward integration (individuation) by embracing and rendering harmless the shadow parts of himself. This dovetailed with Jung's thoughts on God, also sometimes called life or self, not as perfection as manifest in traditional orthodoxy, but as wholeness, the very embracing of opposites. Indeed, *Fifth Business* (1970), *The Manticore* (1972) and *World of Wonders* (1975), chart the quests of three connected protagonists for individuation in these Jungian terms. As with all of Davies's novels, an artist figure is central, if not key, as the conduit through which the personal and collective unconscious speaks and makes the wonders of the world accessible to others. *Fifth Business* in particular has been read as an analogy of the Canadian struggle for national identity and self-recognition. Reception of it at first was cool, until it gained recognition in the United States and other countries; it is now commonly viewed as a masterpiece, and by many as the greatest of his novels.

University life strongly influenced Davies and he decided to write a novel in which it would function as setting and theme. He viewed it as one of the great institutions of Western civilization, proceeding in a direct path from the middle ages and preserving in large part an atmosphere steeped in alchemy, mystery, and the rarefied pursuit of knowledge. This first university novel, *The Rebel Angels* (1981), was published in his last year as Master of Massey, although his connection with Massey continued long after, and the other two novels of The Cornish trilogy, *What's Bred in the Bone* and *The Lyre of Orpheus* in 1985 and 1988 respectively. As with the previous trilogy, issues fundamental to Davies such as individuation, myth, knowledge, the collective unconscious, and artistic creation were of supreme importance, but were amplified and treated from very different perspectives than in the Deptford works.

Very soon after publishing *The Lyre of Orpheus*, Davies decided to approach a subject that had been with him since his youth. Starting with his parents' families, he envisioned a book that would take as its subject the ways in which someone became a Canadian and what, indeed, it meant to be a Canadian. From the time of his theater troubles, he had felt that Canadians were indifferent or even hostile towards the arts, which pained Davies as he believed that it was only through its culture that a country could achieve greatness. These concerns, grafted to his broad meditations on good and evil, as well as life and death, life after death, and the meaning and imperatives of heritage, informed *Murther and Walking Spirits* (1991).

The next and final novel was published in 1994. Called *The Cunning Man*, it once again took up the idea of Jungian wholeness, this time incarnate in the figure of an unorthodox physician who achieves success at cross purposes from traditional institutions and curative praxis. As in all of Davies's novels, other themes that had apparently been with him since his youth surfaced again, revealing a man in constant grips with permanent life-revealing matters.

In 1986, Davies was short listed for two of the most prestigious literary prizes in the world. The first was for the Nobel Prize for Literature, bestowed instead on Wole Soyinka (he was also on the short list in 1992), and the second was the Booker, which was given to Kingsley Amis. Although disappointed, Davies felt after his losses that he could return to a life with a more healthy and balanced perspective. This life after retirement from Massey was filled with activities that he had always loved: traveling, working in education, avidly attending the theater and opera, listening to music, seeing art, and, of course, writing. He was a recipient of numerous high honors, of which several were especially gratifying: the Oxford degrees; the Companion of the Order of Canada; the honorary membership in the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (the first Canadian so honored); investiture as an honorary fellow of Balliol College; and degrees of D. Litt. from Trinity and Dublin Universities. From the early 1970s as well, filmmakers had been taking options on his novels, though to date, no film has been made. *Fifth Business*, however, has been dramatized on television.

Davies died unexpectedly in December of 1995 from a stroke. The last year of his life had been devoted to writing an opera, penning tributes to several friends, and planning a book about old age. *The Merry Heart*, a selection of his writings from 1980-1995, was published in 1996. His widow and daughter are now working on a book containing his writings on the theater.

II. A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF DAVIES'S WORKS

Robertson Davies has been astonishingly prolific. Due to the extent of his work, and the brief nature of this study, a large number of works, mostly uncollected articles and essays, have not been included. The plays are listed here according to their publication dates; their performance dates are listed in Chapter III.

1939

Shakespeare's Boy Actors (criticism). London: J.M. Dent and Sons; 207 pp.

1942

Shakespeare for Young Players: A Junior Course. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 255 pp.

1947

The Diary of Samuel Marchbanks (fictional essays). Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 204 pp.

1948

Overlaid: A Comedy (play). Toronto: Samuel French; 24 pp.

1949

Eros at Breakfast and Other Plays. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 129 pp.
Fortune, My Foe (play). Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 99 pp.
Four Favourite Plays. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 157 pp.
The Table Talk of Samuel Marchbanks (fictional essays). Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 248 pp.

1950

At My Heart's Core (play). Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 91 pp.

1951

Tempest-Tost (novel). Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 376 pp.

1952

A Masque of Aesop (play). Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 47 pp.

1954

Leaven of Malice (novel). Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 312 pp.

1955

A Jig for the Gypsy (play). Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 98 pp.

1958

A Mixture of Frailties (novel). Toronto: Macmillan; 379 pp.

1960

Tyrone Guthrie's Production of Love and Libel. NY: Theater Guild; n.p.
A Voice from the Attic (criticism). Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; 360 pp.

1963

A Masque of Mr. Punch (play). Toronto: Oxford University Press; 58 pp.

1967

Samuel Marchbanks'Almanack (fictional essays). Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; 205 pp.

1970

A Feast of Stephen (anthology). Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; 154 pp.
Fifth Business (novel). Toronto: Macmillan; 314 pp.
Stephen Leacock (criticism). Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; 63 pp.

1972

The Manticore (novel). Toronto: Macmillan; 280 pp.
Hunting Stuart and Other Plays. Toronto: New Press; 274 pp.

1975

Question Time (play). Toronto: Macmillan; 70 pp.
World of Wonders (novel). Toronto: Macmillan; 358 pp.

1977

One Half of Robertson Davies (essays). Toronto: Macmillan; 286 pp.

1979

The Enthusiasms of Robertson Davies: Provocative Pronouncements on a Wide Range of Topics (essays). Ed. Judith Skelton Grant. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; 320 pp.

1981

Brothers in the Black Art (play for television). Vancouver: Alcuin Society; 41 pp.
The Rebel Angels (novel). Toronto: Macmillan; 326 pp.
Robertson Davies: The Well-Tempered Critic: One Man's View of Theater and Letters in Canada (essays). Ed. Judith Skelton Grant. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; 285 pp.

1982

High Spirits (ghost stories). Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England; NY, NY: Penguin; 198 pp.

1983

The Mirror of Nature (criticism). Toronto: University of Toronto Press; 129 pp.

1985

What's Bred in the Bone (novel). Toronto: Macmillan; 436 pp.
The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks (fictional essays). Toronto: Irwin; 540 pp.

1988

The Lyre of Orpheus (novel). Toronto: Macmillan; 472 pp.

1991

Murther and Walking Spirits (novel). Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; 357 pp.

1993

Reading and Writing (essays). Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press; 64 pp.

1994

The Cunning Man (novel). Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; 468 pp.

1995

A Gathering of Ghost Stories. New York: Penguin; 84 pp.

1996

The Merry Heart/Selections 1980-1996 (essays). Toronto: McClelland and Stewart; 385 pp.

In collaboration with Sir Tyrone Guthrie:

1953

Renown at Stratford (essay). Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 127 pp.

1954

Twice Have the Trumpets Sounded (essay). Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 192 pp.

In collaboration with Sir Tyrone Guthrie, Tanya Moiseiwitsch and Boyd Neel:

1955

Thrice the Brinded Cat Hath Mew'd (essay). Toronto: Clarke, Irwin; 178 pp.

III. SUMMARY OF DAVIES'S WORK

(Quotations in this section are from the following editions of Davies's novels: *The Salterton Trilogy*, Penguin, 1986; *The Deptford Trilogy*, Penguin,1983; *The Cornish Trilogy*, Penguin, 1992; *Murther and Walking Spirits*, Penguin, 1991; *The Cunning Man*, Viking Penguin, 1994.)

In the preface to his book about the contemporary artist Anish Kapoor called "Artist as Sacerdos," Germano Celant says: "What is myth? The definitions are many, but essentially myth relates to the force that created the world, and that keeps the world alive through a continuous process of renewal. In Western culture, this force corresponds to the Word, or the timeless mystical sound that created the universe. Myth is sacred and myth is word-"the word that, when repeated, corresponds to ultimate power. The knowledge and interpretation of myth and word (*mythos* actually means "word" in Greek) is entrusted to the priest, the *sacerdos* (the "giver of the sacred"), who, through ritual, seeks to give unitary form to the parts of a lost meaning, and thus to bring the human closer to the divine. In his search for the lost image, the image to be rediscovered, the artist resembles the sacerdos. He tries to reunite what is scattered and dispersed, dried up and spent, in order once again to locate the sources of the mystical force that supports existence" (XI).

In *Conversations with Robertson Davies*, Hulse quotes him as saying: "I just write romances, and when you write romances you have to be Scheherezade and bear in mind that if you do not hold the Caliph's attention he will cut your head off in the morning" (267).

Although Robertson Davies is now known primarily for his novels, this has not always been the case. He has written in virtually every other genre, both fictional and nonfictional: plays; essays; music, theater, and literary reviews; journalistic pieces; short stories; the occasional poem; and hybrids such as his *Marchbanks* collections. Across these genres, themes reappear and repeat like those in a fugue, weaving in and out, introduced, as *Webster*'s dictionary states in defining that term, "by the various instruments or voices in succession with various contrapuntal devices."

Celant's discussion of myth, religion and the artist is apposite to Davies and, indeed, forms the basis of much of his work. When Davies speaks of myth, he speaks of patterns, of Jungian archetypes, forms closer to what we find in folklore and fairy tale than in classical myth, which he considers not nearly as pertinent to northern countries such as Canada. Religion, as well, takes on a nontraditional meaning, quite apart from the orthodoxy of traditional institutions, "a sense of the great things in life," the presence of an unending wonder at the marvels and splendors of the world. And the artist is there as communicator, catalyst, and healer, transmitting information from the unconscious, and making people aware of these wonders.

To begin to understand Davies's work, it is necessary to have at least a passing understanding of Carl Jung's work, upon which so much of it is solidly based. According to Jung, the human psyche is made up of three major areas: the ego, the

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