



David Staunton's Archetypal Journey In Discovering The Truth In The Manticore

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Abstract :

Robertson Davies as a novelist recorded and commented on his experiences which were positive and a part of his life as he lived them. Davies's characters like him in The Deptford Trilogy believe in themselves and do what they think is best for themselves and for the others in contact with them. The key incident in the novel which is recorded as the prologue, describes the archetypal structures which predetermine the personalities of the figures themselves, as well as how they interact. Their respective roles in the snowball episode and the way they experience and react to the incident essentially characterize what becomes later in life is traced in this research paper. The researcher intends to study the main character David Staunton from The Manticore, in the light of rediscovery and in-depth analysis of his inner self and to the other characters.

Keywords : Jungian Archetypes , Illusion, Reality, Dreams, Truth

INTRODUCTION

Canadian Literature is the fruit of a British seed planted on American soil – a Common Wealth Literature glowing in a North American context. Canadian literature – or literatures are written in more than one major language. The array of Canadian Literature is created by the works of the emigrants and refugee writers who still connect with Canada with their creative accomplishments. Canadian Literature has been produced with a rich diversity of styles, themes of individuation and relationship, sin and expiation, banishment and return, estrangement and oneness and an ardent search for identity.

Robertson Davies as a novelist recorded and commented on his experiences which were a part of his life as he lived them. For twenty-eight years he was a journalist, for twenty years he was a university professor (he retired in June 1981), he was a member of many committees and boards and also a dedicated family man who contributed a rich style as a

writer. All of this is a necessary part in his life as a writer. Douglas Gibson in his book titled *Stories about Storytellers* says that Davies had a cool and classical approach to the common things that human beings are up to.

Davies through his writings expressed this positive vision of life. Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay *Self – Reliance* explains the importance of belief to man, “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men – that is genius” (1). Davies realizes his role as a writer to portray and transform mankind in living their dreams and becoming better human beings. The three novels *Fifth Business*, *The Manticore* and *World of Wonders* in *The Deptford* trilogy trace the history of several Canadian families from the early twentieth century to the present.

Davies’s characters in *The Deptford Trilogy* believe in themselves and do what they think is best for themselves and for the others in contact with them. The key incident in the novel which is recorded as the prologue, describes the archetypal structures which predetermine the personalities of the figures themselves, as well as how they interact. Their respective roles in the snowball episode and the way they experience and react to the incident essentially characterize what becomes later in life. The incident of the stone in the snowball episode with which the novel *Fifth Business* opens results in the premature birth of Paul, madness of his mother Mary Dempster and the death of Boyd Staunton. It is also responsible for all the contingent events, which indirectly determine the lives of all the Deptford characters throughout *The Deptford Trilogy*.

The researcher intends to study the main character David Staunton from *The Manticore*, in the light of rediscovery and in-depth analysis of his inner self and to the other characters. David’s spirit of enquiry and thirst to discover the truth behind his father’s death is the core idea of the novel. This idea is matched with his diagnosis of the truth to prove that a sense of relief could be earned over our actions in life. It doesn’t matter whether we find answers or not. Often, we feel a sense of transcendence, as if the boundaries of the self have been expanded and our understanding of life journey is accomplished.

The novel *Manticore* discusses the particular and the universal and portrays how they are explicitly related, through Jungian archetypes and other myths that reveal the inner spiritual life and true self. Davies explores the relationship between illusion and reality, dreams and truth. The novel is narrated by Boyd Staunton’s son, David who has had a nervous breakdown after his father’s death and is undergoing therapy. He examines his life chronologically, so that a completely different perspective is explained in connection to the events narrated by Ramsay in *Fifth Business*.

David, is in Switzerland to work with a Jungian psychoanalyst. David is keen to understand the troubled relationship that he had with his father and as he explores that, we learn more about the other characters in the story. The novel *Manticore*, focuses on David’s breakdown and the process of establishing a meaningful pattern for his life. The novel gets its title from the ‘manticore’ a strange, mythical and fabulous creature with the body of a lion, the face of a man, and a sting in its tail. It stands for nobility, but it is also confused and a dangerous creature. This is the symbol, Robertson Davies employs in this novel *The Manticore*, to convey his considered opinions about the condition and the duality of man.

Following his preliminary session, he begins having strange dreams which he is anxious to find the meaning for, in hope that he can resume his normal life without further

psychoanalysis. He analyses “If I understand the dream, I cannot make head or tail of the gypsy woman with the incomprehensible conversation, and go back to my familiar world” (DT 276). Perplexed by his dream of a gypsy woman muttering unintelligible jargon, David is eager to delve into his subconscious to comprehend what elements composed the dream. This quest to discover the meaning of a dream leads to a complete analysis of his psyche. Compelled to search his soul for the purpose of dream interpretation, David is drawn into an inspection of his innermost thoughts that leads to knowledge of himself entirely.

The interpretation of David Staunton’s multitude of mystical dreams leads to an awareness of himself. During the course of his therapy David finds that he is having many strange dreams. In order to remember them he records them in a journal. Many of these dreams he shares with his psychiatrist, who helps him to analyse them, but he keeps some of his dreams veiled from her, in order to contemplate the meaning by himself. David interprets his dreams and he is aware that they have a deeper meaning than may be seen at first glance. The slow interpretation of his dreams is a slow revelation of his psyche. Through the fastidious analysis of his mystifying and disturbing dreams David is slowly gaining an awareness of himself, which heightens his self-knowledge.

David is led towards self-knowledge by a manticore, a mythical creature, that appears to him in a dream. Intrigued by the concept of this mythical creature, David analyses his dream. In an attempt to find the meaning of the beast he must first analyse himself to determine his similarities to the frightening manticore which bore his own face. The interpretation of the manticore and its inherent qualities in relation to David’s traits allow David to unveil the secrets of himself, gaining the knowledge of who he truly is. Dr Johanna von Haller, explains to David, how he had played his cards wrong in his life. She tells him: “Do you know Ibsen's poem –To live it to do battle with trolls in the vaults of the heart and brain. To write: that is to sit in judgement over one’s self” (320).

Indeed, the first section of the book is made up entirely of conversations -sessions - between David Staunton and his therapist. The whole analysis is based on Jungian philosophy: Staunton is the son of Percy Boyd Staunton, whom we remember from *Fifth Business* chiefly for dying in a car at the bottom of Ontario harbour, with a large round pebble in his mouth. David is tortured by the need to know who killed him, and why and the book opens with him recalling how he interrupted a show by the illusionist Magnus Eisengrim (also familiar to us from *Fifth Business* as Paul Dempster, whose mother suffers a spiritual death by a snowball in the trilogy’s opening pages and who is the subject of the third book, *World of Wonders*) by calling out “Who killed Boy Staunton?” (FB 256). The answer given by the Brazen Head of Friar Bacon in the last performance of the *Soiree of Illusions* was “He was killed by the usual cabal: by himself, first of all; by the woman he knew; by the woman he did not know; by the man who granted his inmost wish; and by the inevitable fifth, who was keeper of his conscience and keeper of the stone” (256).

The novel gets dramatic and Davies combines a twinkling charm and plausible authority in this novel where everything he says or everything his character’s say are ringed with authenticity, so the reader begins to feel, that a life’s learning and wisdom is contained in the book, and that even if the characters and scenes are fictional, everything else is true. It’s a quite extraordinary talent Davies has nurtured. In a dream David dreams of a wild Gypsy woman in colourful rags whose speech is strange to him. Dr von Haller suggests this was an “anticipatory dream” (275) – that the Gypsy was a preview of her, another foreigner whose

language is strange to him and from whom he is inclined to flee. "Dreams do not foretell the future", she observes. "They reveal states of mind in which the future is implicit" (276). With this exchange, we are in the midst of the liveliest account of the process of a Jungian analysis that the readers enjoy in *The Manticore*, the central novel in *The Deptford Trilogy* by the word master Robertson Davies.

In the version of the dream that Davies' character tells his analyst, the manticore has his own face and the woman commanding it is Dr Johanna von Haller. When she tells him the name of the beast, he asks, "How can I dream about something I've never heard of?" She responds: "People very often dream of things they don't know . . . It is because great myths are not invented stories but objectifications of images and situations that lie very deep in the human spirit (404,405). Here the reader gets deep into the Jungian understanding of the archetypes of the collective unconscious, and the credit goes to Robertson Davies' the master of word magic and marvellous ear for dialogue. This is how Dr Von Haller introduces the concept of archetypes.

Davies's message to the readers is that we must come to grips with the objectivity of life, otherwise we live in the middle of a great hallucination. David Staunton remains chained to the shadow of his powerful father for the best part of his life although in adulthood he defies the parental intentions and strives to become a person in his own right. But the bondage is deep-seated and retains a strong influence despite the superficial break. He loses his ability to feel, that had before been merely underdeveloped. He becomes a dissolute and celibate intellectual romantic.

His therapy frees him of this but not until he meets Liesl, and she takes him into the depths of the earth in a cave which was two hundred feet deep. Here he is forced to look and experience a scene of prehistoric rites from whence he can be born again, does the rational mind give way to feeling and sensation. Then he achieves that second type of maturity which is the mark of the integrated personality. Liesl tells him "You must be reborn into the sun you love so much, so let us lose no time. Leave your torch, here, by the way out" (509). Carl Rogers in his article 'This is me' talks about each person being "an island unto himself, in a very real sense; and he can only build bridges to other islands if he is first of all willing to be himself and permitted to be himself" (21). This is what David accomplishes at the end of the novel.

His resistance to feeling had been sorely tested at times. As a teenager he was once compelled to witness an acquaintance defecating on a pile of family photographs in a stranger's house. He was later forced to look upon the mutilated face of his drowned father's corpse, after a death mask made of dental cement had been forcibly removed. Later still, as a young lawyer he watched a client hang, fascinated by man's ejaculation as he died. These events had little outward effect on David. It had been drilled into him by his father Boy, to be manly at all costs – so much so it had unmanned him. He drinks more and more, and suffers his cynicism because the alternatives, to feel, to love, to be outraged, are beyond him. Only until and after the analysis, it opens him up to himself and the selves he contains. Then he becomes unaccountably whole.

Dr Von advises David not to create an outward self with which he can face the world, and some people come to believe that is what he truly is. She sites examples of people in different walks in life, like doctors who are nothing outside of the consulting-room, and judges who are nothing when they are not in court, and business men who wither with boredom when

they have to retire from business, and teachers who are forever teaching. These people become poor specimens when they are caught without their masks on. They have lived chiefly through the Persona.

David Staunton learns gradually through his treatment that every individual must and can accomplish intellectual and spiritual growth through contemplating and pondering about the self, and in turn one comes to understand and realize the importance of feeling. David at the end of the novel has an opportunity in meeting Dunstan, Eisengrim and Liesl and he clarifies his mind-boggling question "Who killed Boyd Staunton" (FB 256). The answers he receives to the puzzle of the brazen head makes him understand that his father's actions were the cause of his own destruction. His suicidal death after a realization and awareness makes him a self-actualized man, who is liberated after his death.

The Manticore repeats the movement a third time. David Staunton moves through the same phase, but his actual movement through the physical (Myrrha Martindale), emotional (Judith Wolff) and intellectual (Pargetter of Balliol) levels of experience is reminiscent of the struggles in the first two Salterton novels in that it is largely meaningless to him at the time and does not result in significant growth. The emphasis is not, however, on the actual movement, but rather on its analysis in terms of Jungian symbolism in a retrospective psychoanalytic setting. It is this analysis of past events which provides Staunton with the insights necessary for the integration of his experiences into a meaningful process of individuation. The novel adds a third element to the theme of growth, the role of the Psyche, by means of which it brings into clearer focus the tribulations and attainments of the earlier seekers.

David Staunton after his visit to the cave, decides to leave his "enclosed, ordered, respected life" (DT 514) and ventures and dreams into an unknown country and "goes down the circular staircase inside the strange, deceptive hut – so wretched on the outside and so rich within" (514). Dreams no longer disturb him, instead he decides to enjoy his dreams and live those visions to the fullest. He also becomes a self-actualized man. In the words of Abraham Maslow, David's "easy penetration into reality, lives a closer approach to an animal-like or child-like acceptance and spontaneity" (181). This awareness of his own impulses, desires and opinions directs him and makes him into a person. He determines the reality in himself – and when he fully experiences the feelings of self-pity, hatred and love at the organic level he feels an assurance that he is being a part of his real self.

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