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Prvky gotického románu a Southern Ontario Gothic v díle Robertsona Daviese

Features of the Gothic Novel and Southern Ontario Gothic in the Works of Robertson Davies

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Anotace

Gotický román je jedním z nejvýraznějších literárních směrů, přestože není zařazen mezi styl vysoký. Tento žánr vrcholil koncem 18. století, a ačkoliv jeho nejslavnější časy již pominuly, prvky gotického románu se objevují v literatuře i dnes. V průběhu staletí se vyvinulo mnoho podtypů gotického románu, jedním z nich je i Southern Ontario Gothic (jihoontarijská gotika). Tato odnož se vyznačuje kritikou sociálních poměrů, politiky, víry či rasy typickými pro danou oblast, v kombinaci s prvky nadpřirozena, magického realismu nebo i satiry. Robertson Davies, jehož romány patří mezi významná díla jihoontarijské gotiky, je dnes považován za klasika kanadské literatury. Cílem této práce je porovnat prvky klasického gotického románu s prvky Southern Ontario Gothic a pojednat o těchto prvcích v souvislosti s dílem Robertsona Daviese *The Deptford Trilogy* (Deptfordská trilogie).

Úvodní kapitola se obecně zabývá teoretickými aspekty gotické literatury a definuje zavedenou terminologii. Výraz “gotický“ je užíván v mnoha souvislostech a oborech, proto může mít řadu významů. V kapitole je rovněž představen proud jihoontarijské gotiky coby uznávaná odnož gotického románu.

Druhá kapitola pojednává o společných tématech která se vyskytují v kanadské kultuře. Kolonizace, identita, divočina a domov jsou náměty, které se vztahují ke kanadské minulosti a obecně se v literatuře Kanady opakují. Jelikož se tato témata se mohou vázat i k jiným oblastem země, jsou typická pro celou kanadskou gotiku, a nejen pro podžánr jihoontarijské gotiky. Jedná se o poněkud ponuré náměty, není tedy neobvyklé, že se jimi zabývají autoři i v gotickém diskurzu. Krátká pasáž je věnována autoru trilogie Robertsonu Daviesovi.

Následující kapitola se věnuje zkoumání rysů gotiky a jihoontarijské gotiky na základě románů *Pátá Postava* (1970), *Manticore* (1972), *Svět divů* (1975) Robertsona Daviese. Gotické prvky jsou děleny podle hlavních postav Dunstablů Ramseyho, Mary Dempsterové a Paula Dempstera. Každá z postav vykresluje jeden z archetypů Carla Gustava Junga, a ten ovlivňuje její povahu. Různorodost postav se odráží v odlišnosti použitých gotických prvků.

V závěrečné kapitole jsou prvky identity, prostředí, postav, vznešena, nadpřirozena, viny, grotesknosti a maloměšřáctví, které byly dříve pojednány v souvislosti s dílem Daviese, porovnány z hlediska jejich zobrazení v gotickém a kanadském kontextu.

Klíčová slova: Gotická literatura, Jihoontarijská gotika, Robertson Davies

Abstract

The gothic novel, albeit not considered high literature, counts among the most distinctive literary genres. The literary form was at its prime in late 18th century, although its days of glory have past elements of the Gothic can be found even in contemporary literature. Over the centuries, several sub-genres of the gothic novel have developed, including Southern Ontario Gothic. This branch of the Gothic is characterized by criticism of social attitudes towards race, politics, gender and religion specific for that region, in combination with elements of the supernatural, magic realism and satire. Robertson Davies, whose novels belong to the most significant works of Southern Ontario Gothic, is considered to be a Canadian literature classic. The aim of this paper is to compare the elements of a classical gothic novel with the elements of Southern Ontario Gothic in Robertson Davies' *The Deptford Trilogy*.

The initial chapter covers the theoretical background to the problematic of the Gothic and defines the commonly used terminology. The term "gothic" is used in many contexts and fields, and therefore can carry various meanings. The chapter also introduces Southern Ontario Gothic as an acknowledged sub-genre.

In the second chapter, some common themes that occur in Canadian culture are introduced. Colonization, identity, wilderness and home are issues related to the Canadian past and are generally present in Canada's literature. These themes can relate to other regions of the country, therefore they are associated with Canadian gothic in general, and not only with the Southern Ontario branch. The themes are somewhat gloomy in nature, hence it is not uncommon for authors to analyze them in one of the gothic discourses. A short section is also devoted to the writer of the novels, Robertson Davies.

In the following chapter the features of Southern Ontario Gothic and Gothic literature are explored based on Davies' novels *Fifth Business* (1970), *The Manticore* (1972), and *World of Wonders* (1975). The gothic elements are divided according to the main characters of Dunstable Ramsey, Mary Dempster, and Paul Dempster. Each of these characters is based on a Carl Gustav Jung archetype, influencing its nature. As a result, the gothic elements presented differ character to character.

In the final chapter the elements of identity, setting, characters, the sublime, supernatural, guilt, grotesque and small-town, which were previously discussed in relation to the Davies novels, are compared as to their treatment in the gothic and Canadian gothic context.

Key words: Gothic literature, Southern Ontario Gothic, Robertson Davies

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1. Introduction

Gothic has been around for nearly twelve hundred years. Despite the diversity it has gained, what people associate with Gothic is usually a stereotypical concept that has been generalized from popular and most accessible forms of Gothic – literature and film. *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, or the film *Nosferatu* are some of the best known works that have spread the notion of Gothic. At the same time, however, the image that they present is only partial of what the term “gothic” conveys. Due to this, the general perception of Gothic is specific and is limited to haunted spooky castles, dark isolated sceneries and creepy distorted characters. To understand the full scope of what Gothic is, it is necessary to return to the origins of the word.

Gothic:

1. noting or pertaining to a style of architecture, originating in France in the middle of the twelfth century and existing in the western half of Europe through the middle of the sixteenth century
2. pertaining to or designating the style of painting, sculpture, etc. Produced between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, esp. in northern Europe
3. of or pertaining to the language of the Teutonic Goths
4. pertaining to the Middle Ages; barbarous; rude
5. noting or pertaining to a style of literature characterized by a gloomy setting, grotesque or violent events, and an atmosphere of degeneration and decay
6. the arts and crafts of the Gothic period
7. the extinct Germanic language of the Goths, preserved esp. in the fourth-century translation by Ulfilas of the Bible

The entry from the Webster¹ shows how manifold Gothic can be. It is associated with different cultural fields, i.e. literature, architecture, painting, sculpture, art, language, style, or perhaps history. Depending on the context it can refer to a specific time period, a society, or it may merely carry some of their features. That being said, referring to a subject as “gothic“ does not necessarily specify its nature unless it is clear which field it is related to. The term has acquired so many meanings depending on the context that on its own it may be too general to signify much unless it is a special term or phrase. It can also be an approach, mood, visual aspect or a certain point of view. Hence “gothic“ does not have to define nouns in the same ways. This does not imply that their meanings contradict each other. Rather, their

¹ Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language. (New York: Portland House, 1989) 611

meanings overlap; the characteristics of the word do not apply to all its uses.

The term “Gothic” can acquire a certain set of meanings depending on the context and field. This is likewise true within fields. There are many types of Gothic, and there are also many types of literary Gothic. American Gothic, Irish Gothic, Victorian Gothic, Caribbean Gothic, Post-colonial Gothic, German Gothic, French Gothic and Female Gothic, to name a few. Although they are all versions of Gothic literature, they need not be comparable. They occur in various time periods and therefore they are created in different cultural and social environments. Trends in literature varied, hence the gothic elements in the works share certain features, although the works are Gothic in different ways. For example in Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* the key features are the typical Gothic elements of villainous and innocent characters, castle and landscape scenarios et cetera, which create a gloomy atmosphere, whereas in *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens the Gothic aspects illustrate decay, suspense and bitterness without influencing the mood of the entire novel.

Although Gothic is usually associated with notions connected to the past, this does not mean that it cannot be current. Even today artists use Gothic elements to express their points of view or to help create an image of themselves and their work. Generally, the traditional idea of Gothic has grown to other means of presentation. This applies to all forms of Gothic, however, it is probably most visible through media like fashion, lifestyle or music. In the original artistic and historic genre, Gothic has also developed; the tendency is to deal with concepts in a manner specific to a certain region or topic. Gothic features are taken and put into new contexts.

It is apparent from the types of literary Gothic mentioned above that Gothic is commonly narrowed down to and discussed within terms of geography and time periods to give a new point of view. Southern Ontario Gothic and Southern American Gothic are perfect examples of this regionalism. Apart from the fact that it describes the respective local issues, regional Gothic is difficult to define since it does not share as many features of traditional Gothic as others; each region has its own literary scope which is unique for that location. The combinations of theme, writing style and other elements are always specific and cannot be easily compared.

Canada has several types of Gothic, two of which will be presently dealt with in detail: Canadian Gothic and Southern Ontario Gothic. Canadian Gothic is not officially acknowledged as a term, however, features of the Gothic novel can be found in numerous Canadian literary works. For the purposes of this paper, what is generally considered to be Canadian Gothic is fiction written by Canadian authors who adapt aspects of the literary

Gothic to fit their designs, and which also uses features other than those in Southern Ontario Gothic.

Southern Ontario Gothic, on the other hand, is a genre that developed directly from the Gothic novel. The name of the genre was created by chance after several authors had used elements of Southern Ontario Gothic in their works². Due to that the boundaries of the genre are quite broad, and there is no precise definition. It incorporates features of the Gothic novel and Canadian literature typical of the Southern Ontario area. Southern Ontario Gothic most notably displays criticism of social attitudes towards race, politics, gender or religion specific for that region. It points to certain stereotypes of the region such as Protestant morality, hypocrisy and conservatism of small towns. Characters that act against the local conventions and moral thinking are often depicted negatively; their distorted physical appearance signalizes at first glance that they are not a part of the majority. Other features that are associated with Southern Ontario Gothic are grotesque and supernatural elements, although these are not shared by all authors of this genre. The list of writers who are considered to use elements of Southern Ontario Gothic includes Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Robertson Davies, Barbara Gowdy, Timothy Findley, Jane Urquhart or James Reaney.

It might seem that the two Canadian Gothics are the same, and that they differ only in region. There are certain features that can be applied to both the Gothic types, however, there are elements that are distinctive only to one of the types. Southern Ontario Gothic is sometimes criticized for resembling a form of realism, rather than a subgenre of Gothic. The aim of this paper will be to find elements of Southern Ontario Gothic and Canadian Gothic in the novels *Fifth Business*, *The Manticore*, and *World of Wonders* written by Robertson Davies.

Robertson Davies is probably most known for his achievements in theatre, however he was also a well acclaimed novelist, journalist and professor. All of his working careers were driven by the same passion for information and wisdom. He was very much interested in learning new things, and then presenting them through his own plays, novels, columns or articles to the public. One of his biggest assets was the effort to improve Canadian theatre and literature of the day, which was not considered to be very successful at the time. Davies realized that it (cultivation, development, progression) was not only a matter of literature, but mainly the issue of the nation and its past. He believed that writing came out of the tradition of story-telling which he linked to mythology and imagination.

According to Robertson Davies, mythology is based on experience of a community and it captures its history from its early existence onward. While mythology is a part of their

² Grame Gibbon. *Eleven Canadian Novelists*. (Toronto: Anansi, 1973)

literature, people usually read works from their current everyday life and turn to mythology only when they look for answers from the past. Ever since their ancestors, those who wrote the texts, have gone through similar experience, people can relate to them as they are a part of the same culture. In this way, culture is embedded in the collective unconsciousness and is important for realizing one's national and personal identity³. Canada of course has a mythology and culture, but it is not consistent and does not give an appealing image of the nation to the viewers. From an early age, Davies was conscious of the fact that he was Canadian, and tried to promote an awareness that the nation does not need to follow the American or British model of culture and lifestyle anymore.

The novels *Fifth Business*, *The Manticore*, and *World of Wonders* were written between 1970 and 1975, and are commonly referred to as the Deptford Trilogy. In the first work, two boys from Deptford, Dunstan Ramsey and Percy Boyd, accidentally hit a woman in her head with a rock hidden in a snowball, which causes her to prematurely give birth to her son Paul Dempster. This scene influences the lives of these three main characters, and they each narrate their account of this and later events in the three novels. Although they move out of the fictional village of Deptford, they keep coming across each other throughout the story. Each book is narrated by a different character, and it expands and refers to the matters of the first novel from their points of view.

First and foremost, Robertson Davies is a Southern Ontario Gothic writer. I would like to examine his work from the perspective of Gothic literature. He is not a typical Gothic author, nonetheless this paper will deal with the gothic elements and features his trilogy contains.

³ Robertson Davies. *The Merry Heart*. (New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1996) 44

2. Canadian Gothic

In Canadian literature the genre of Southern Ontario Gothic is a well known and acclaimed type of writing. Despite it being widely recognized, the genre lacks a precise definition for various reasons, some of which have been discussed previously. In addition, authors who use the Gothic mode merge it with their own style of writing, and blur the boundaries even further.

I would like to argue that there are features in Canadian literature that can be related to the Gothic, but are not necessarily associated with Southern Ontario Gothic. These elements have been recurring in literature of all Canadian regions, not only Ontario, and have more to do with the history and mentality of the country than literature.

In the past 3 or 4 decades many writers have been debating whether Canada actually has a national literature. Most come to the conclusion that it does not. Hence, the follow up question is: why? A wave of searching and looking into the past was triggered in order to find unifying elements that would finally create and honourably represent Canadian culture. Journeys into the past can be exciting and full of enthusiasm, but in the Canadian context it turned out to be rather awkward since Canadian history is full of violence and blood of its own population.

The land of Canada was first settled by French and British colonisers, who forced the original Aboriginal peoples to move into reservations. It can be said that Canada has experience with colonizing and being colonized.⁴ Throughout the twentieth century Canada was gaining independence from the British Parliament, and only recently, in 1982, Canada became a part of the British Commonwealth, thus becoming an “autonomous” country. For a large part of its history, Canada was heavily ruled and influenced by Great Britain and the United States of America (and to a certain degree it still is) which prevented it from building a truly Canadian culture.⁵ There are many ethnic minorities that live in Canada who have their own mythologies and views.⁶ The population is also dispersed all over the vast land. In addition to size, the terrain of Canada consists of a variety of landscape and climate. As a result, as Justin D. Edwards points out, there are many aspects where Canada is “caught in-between“ that “generate paradoxes within Canadian identity and textuality“.⁷

There are many political, geographical and cultural factors that help shape Canada.

4 Justin D. Edwards. Gothic Canada, p.XXI

5 Edwards XIV

6 Edwards XV

7 Edwards XIV

Based on the nature of events it is apparent that the essence of what is Canadian is formed on the principle of combining notions together like a puzzle, rather than recognizing a development or generalization of all its key features. This resembles the idea of multiculturalism practised in Canada; each ethnic, cultural group or community cherishes their own customs and views without compromising them to the majority. All these create a cultural mosaic which can often consist of opposite beliefs. It is nearly impossible, then, to get a united culture. This does not mean that there are no similarities or common issues. On the contrary, I would say that regardless of the different interpretations, many issues are left unsettled and unclear, which leaves all parties upset and bitter.

In this section I would like to discuss four notions that occur in Canadian literature, and that are often depicted in the gothic mode. Colonization, identity, wilderness, and home are complex issues that relate to Canadian history and mentality. In the eyes of many people these remain unresolved and belong to topics that are somewhat tabooed. What they have in common is their connection to history and their psychological impact on an individual. There are many ways of coping with them; therefore there is no universal solution, which is why they are still current.

2.1 Colonization

Colonization has had the biggest impact on the history of Canada. It reflects the mixed desire of expanding a country while wanting to gain independence. This discrepancy “creates an obsessive mindset“, which is often expressed in literature by using “ghostly figures who haunt“.⁸ The gothic mode is fitting for portraying issues from the past, not only colonization but also war traumas, injustice, violence and isolation through its numerous literary tools. These can be presented for example through the use of supernatural elements, characterization, or narrative. Justin D. Edwards writes that “the Canadian gothic becomes an important textual mode for trying to come to terms with a postcolonial past and its multicultural and diasporic complexity.“⁹ The fact that authors are able to accurately express their thoughts through this genre provides a purifying effect to the readers.

The “ghostly figures“ appear here as reminders from the past. They represent the dead who have been robbed by injustice, the medium of gothic enables them to tell their truth. Slavoj Zizek terms them “ideological apparatuses“ who haunt the following generations for political reasons. Hauntings are usually repeated, therefore they can be viewed as an heritage of the past which symbolizes the times of empire and its oppression “that has forced the voice

8 Edwards XXI

9 Edwards XXI

of the colonized into the unconscious of the imperial subject and thus haunted the colonizer across generations, time and space¹⁰.

Colonization is associated with power and dominance. By consuming the colonized it diminishes the cultural specificity of the victim, and supports homogeneity. According to Justin D. Edwards the colonizers can in some cases become victims as well. When an empire sends troops to colonize and assimilate local minorities to a new country, the colonizers themselves have to fight in an unknown environment, which puts them into a similar position like the colonized. Thus it “blurs the boundaries between the consumer and the consumed, and the gap is bridged¹¹. A paradox is then created where, for the sake of civilization, colonization forces its power on a less developed, and therefore weaker community, yet by using violence it degrades itself to the level of the colonized. “Colonization is represented as eroding stable structures of difference that it works to maintain, for its consumption and savage treatment of otherness commits to a process of homogenization and assimilation that reveals the deeper barbarism of civilization.¹² Despite the original effort to assimilate minorities with the new population, some of the communities were moved to reservations and kept there. The native and other groups become the Other, and become evidence of the past.

2.2 Identity

Many authors have found it difficult to define the Canadian identity. The truth is that there are not many things that would unite Canadians to create a unique shared identity. Most of the population originally came from different countries, and throughout its history were influenced by two other societies – the USA and Great Britain. Although the language and history are significant factors, they do not characterize Canadians in any exceptional way. What usually reflects the culture and identity is a national literature (mythology), however that is precisely what Canada does not have.

Canada’s literature is assembled from many metanarratives which cannot form a shared one. Justin D. Edwards claims that “the lack of such unifying stories reveals the strain of a pluralist society¹³. Since literature is viewed as one of the main traits that reveals the culture’s “past, present and future“, if this aspect of a nation is missing, it can be said that it is “an unstable ideological project¹⁴. As a result, the image Canadian literature presents is that its identity is shattered. The problem of vulnerable and split identities is commonly treated in

10 Edwards XXIX

11 Edwards 19

12 Edwards 20

13 Edwards XXIII

14 Edwards XXIII

Gothic literature. In the Canadian context the issues of “disruptions in the stable categories of race, nationality, class and gender“ that “result in a dread“¹⁵ are typical for Canadian Gothic.

A great deal of time elapsed before Canadians found the courage to look into their past and begin the search for their identity. The initial step was to overcome fear from finding out the truth about their past. As Margaret Atwood writes, there is a “fear on the part of Canadians of knowing who they are“¹⁶. Furthermore, they worry that they will find emptiness, “a void“¹⁷. Another matter is linked to the difficulty of finding an identity. If they do not know the self, they cannot define the Other (what they are not). This leads to the issue of the home, the question of where home is, or who is home in Canada arises¹⁸.

It is apparent, then, that where one was born is irrelevant. Multiculturalism enables foreigners to accept Canada as their home. At the same time if an individual born in the country does not recognize his own identity, he is in a similar position like the newcomer, he can also feel displaced. Canadianness is therefore a matter of the mind, mentality or society, rather than place.

Justin D. Edwards says that the vague identity can be viewed as “a site of abjection“, in other words a constant feeling of emptiness. In order to overcome it, it “must be repressed (...) to attain a place within the symbolic order“¹⁹. He proposes that Canadians should imagine that they are “stable subjects“ to cross the gap. By doing that, however, nothing is resolved, and “the equilibrium“ is only a pretence.²⁰ “The mysterious darkness and horrific suspense of the Canadian gothic narrative tells us that we never do get past our feelings of instability, that the reality of abjection will always exceed our best imaginative attempts to stabilize it“²¹. Robertson Davies comes to the same conclusion: “Modern Canada is a prosperous country, but the miseries of its earliest white inhabitants is bred in the bone, and cannot, even now, be rooted out of the flesh“²².

An identity is created within, by and for a community. Usually the identity is formed naturally, and represents what the society really is. Some criteria can, however, be artificially added, and so in reality do not fulfil the difference of the self and the Other. This misconception often occurs with categories such as ethnicity. “Anxiety arises out of this vision of fluid identity, illustrating how gothic production is linked to the crossing of

15 Edwards XXIV

16 Edwards XXIV

17 Edwards XXV

18 Edwards XXV

19 Edwards XXV-XXVI

20 Edwards XXVI

21 Edwards XXVI

22 Davies. *The Merry Heart* 49

boundaries, of traversing the limits whereby identity is conventionally fixed²³. Social prejudice can freeze even other features of identity that are challenged in gothic novels. With the ability to hide and cover physical and psychological aspects of identity categories such as gender, age, class and visual appearance, these can become more vague or unrecognizable. Having said that, “when the self and its surroundings lose their ontological consistencies“ the remaining notions become destabilized as well. The external features of the identity overpower the “essential notion of the self“²⁴. An unordinary visual appearance or trait may overshadow the identity even if it is not in crisis simply because it is immediately noticeable.

2.3 Wilderness

With a bit of exaggeration it can be said that the wilderness was the first gothic element the European colonizers came across in Canada. Historically, the wilderness confirms everything that has been written about it. In the first years of colonization not many people apart from the Aboriginal peoples could survive the severe winters, and therefore the wild landscape truly represents “the unexplored, the unconscious, the romantic, the mysterious, and the magical“²⁵.

Other authors do not regard it as positively as Margaret Atwood. For Susanna Moodie wilderness is a “strange“, “frightful“, “terrifying place that is only fit for wild beasts“, like a “nightmare from which she cannot awake“²⁶.

As Margot Northey points out, there is a great contrast between the images America and Canada presented while attracting settlers to their countries. “America is depicted as a space of liberation and freedom. Literary portraits of the Canadian settler, however, depict him as struggling against the threatening forests or the harshness of the prairies“²⁷. Apart from staying alive, the settler is also challenged in keeping his sanity, for “it is a place of fear, a place that might rob [him] of his subjectivity, reducing [him] to an insignificant feature on the cruel terrain“²⁸.

Susan Glickman agrees that the “landscape has been represented as a ‘wilderness of horrors‘“, however she sees it as a “space of opportunity that offers a ‘cathartic experience“²⁹. By being exposed to the wilderness, the individual experiences fear of the

23 Edwards 7-8

24 Edwards 12

25 Margaret Atwood. "Canadian Monsters" *The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture*. Ed. David Staines. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977) 100

26 Edwards XXVIII

27 Edwards XXVIII

28 Edwards XXVIII

29 Edwards 28

sublime nature, which enables them to rethink their past and thus reach a purifying, ballanced state of mind. Unlike other authors, Glickman believes that the terror of the sublime is not permanent, or as she says “terminal“, but “transitional“: “fear is simply an emotive stage that the subject must pass through in order to transcend the alienation of the sublime and move into the realm of admiration“³⁰.

The wild nature is a common setting in Canadian gothic literature since it is linked with the colonial history of the country. It is a background to a “violent history of empire, a history of loss, mourning, melancholy and trauma“³¹. “The ground upon which the colonized encounters the colonizer is a haunted site where we find the recycling of a previous demand that has been inadequately dealt with“³².

The wilderness is a reminder of the colonial history. It can be hard then to recognize it as a home land, as it can pass on the feeling of violence, danger or guilt, which make it seem foreign. “It becomes simultaneously homely and unhomely, familiar and unfamiliar, inside and outside by questioning the division between the foreign space of the traveller and the home ground of the colony“³³.

2.4 Home

Canada was settled through colonization by the British Empire. Robertson Davies says that it was “never the favourite colony because it is a land that has never appealed powerfully to the European imagination“³⁴. Therefore those who were sent there “tended to regard it as a place of exile“³⁵. They were foreigners on their home ground³⁶. Margaret Atwood goes further to say that it is not only a question of the new territory, but also a psychological matter. “Canada has always been an unknown territory for the people who live in it (...) Canada as a state of mind, as a space you inhabit not just in your body but in your head. It’s the kind of space in which we find ourselves lost“³⁷.

It is apparent from the previous quote that the issue of unhomeliness is still present in Canada, and that it is linked with the mentality or psyche of an individual. “The concept of home seems to be tied in some way with the notion of identity“³⁸. If a subject comes into a

30 Edwards 28

31 Edwards XXIX

32 Edwards XXIX

33 Edwards 4

34 Davies, *The Merry Heart* 44

35 Davies, *The Merry Heart* 44-5

36 Edwards XXV

37 Edwards XXV

38 Edwards XXXI

new environment, a “foreign territory“, their identity is shaken³⁹.

Sigmund Freud wrote an essay “The Uncanny“ (date?), in which he describes the feeling of something ‘vaguely familiar’. He describes this feeling “as arising when one experiences something that is strangely familiar, an emotion that moves the subject from the homely to the unhomely“⁴⁰. In German the term is *unheimlich*, meaning “unhomely“, or even “unsettling“⁴¹. As Justin D. Edwards points out, Canada’s settlement on a foreign territory and effort to make it their own was “at the cost of other cultures and nations“⁴². Hence, “the uncanny connotes the dark and mysterious world of the irrational which lies in opposition to the ‘civilization’ implied in the colonist paradigm. By extension, the externalized *unheimlich* space that cannot be settled becomes internalized as part of the geography of the self“⁴³.

The fact that the issue of homeliness is related to identity means that it does not have to occur only when being in a new place. Even homes that have been in use for long periods of time can become unhomy, usually after some unpleasant or unexpected event happens. The environment becomes uncanny, and the subject then becomes estranged. As a result “the domestic realm threatens and forces [it, them] toward a state of abjection“⁴⁴.

Jonathan Kertzer claims that homes in Canada will always be cursed with the fear of unhomeliness. “The formation of a Canadian ‘home’ is haunted by a fear that (...) however hard one tries to domesticate it, one’s home [will] remain alien territory“⁴⁵. This fear comes from the subconscious knowledge that the “space (...) has a dreaded, undecipherable underside that is always potentially monstrous“⁴⁶. The notion of home is also influenced by the community in it. Identities are shaped by the society, therefore if an individual is not liked; he may feel unwelcome, which in turn can change into an uncanny experience.

39 Edwards XXXI

40 Edwards XX

41 Edwards XX

42 Edwards XX

43 Edwards XX

44 Edwards 58

45 Edwards 59

46 Edwards 59

3. Robertson Davies

William Robertson Davies was born in 1913 in a small village called Thamesville in Ontario, Canada into a literary family. His Welsh father owned several newspapers, and was also a senator. This background allowed Robertson Davies to read a lot of fiction and non-fiction from his early childhood, and supported his interest in literature, knowledge and culture in general. As a child, when reading adventure books for young boys he once noticed that “everything interesting happened somewhere else”⁴⁷, for most of the novels were not Canadian, but imported from the USA or UK. Some years later he was told that “nobody is interested in Canada”⁴⁸, which seemed to explain why the country did not produce its own fiction literature. He soon made his own opinion on that matter and thought that it was time for Canada to write novels and other fiction for the sake of the nation. He claimed that “Canada has had more than enough of gaseous, self-justifying political reminiscence and biography; the distilled thoughts of an artist of fine and strongly individual perception have a value far beyond such nonsense.”⁴⁹

Davies believed that culture is essential for the development of the nation. Canada has had a very ambivalent history which remains ambiguous to this day, and leaves many Canadians unclear of their pasts. Due to this they lack a common experience – mythology – that would unite them together. According to Davies, a mythology “looks very much like the unconscious mind of a people, that area which is accessible only in dreams and visions, and where extraordinary energy resides. (...) Can it really be that Canada has (...) no soul?”⁵⁰ Since Canada originated as a colony of France and Great Britain, and shares the border with the United States of America, a country with a much stronger economy and developed culture, it is clear that it could not and did not need to compete with these countries in certain areas, including culture. The same language and the proximity of the borders made the production of Canadian books unprofitable, therefore unnecessary. What Davies realized was that the nation needed a culture to develop its identity and presentation. He wrote that “a country’s literature is a crystal ball into which its people may look to understand their past and their present, and to find some foretaste of their future.”⁵¹ That is why he saw it important to include imagination into literature instead of writing reports, biographies and journals.

Davies’ approach towards writing plays and novels is complex. In theme and form he

47 Davies, *The Merry Heart* 11

48 Davies, *The Merry Heart* 11

49 Davies, *The Merry Heart* 17

50 Davies, *The Merry Heart* 43-44

51 Davies, *The Merry Heart* 62

is quite traditional. His goal was to write about Canada “as a climate of being, an ambience, an inescapable psychological fact”⁵²; he dealt with issues such as myth, knowledge, the collective unconscious, artistic creation, or individuation, which are related to the Canadian identity. Although these topics are rather serious, Davies believed that they should be addressed with humour. In the beginning of his career this was not accepted well because “as Margaret Atwood had said, Canadian literature has a strong pull toward what is sombre and negative”⁵³.

52 Davies, *The Merry Heart* 57

53 Davies, *The Merry Heart* 56

4. The Sublime

Theories on the sublime in the 18th century had a significant impact on the beginnings of the gothic novel. One of the first definitions, by Longinus, speaks about the deceptiveness of beauty: “in great natures their very greatness spells danger”⁵⁴. Edmund Burke’s take on the sublime is more severe, when he explains that the necessary element of sublime is terror. “Terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle”⁵⁵. He also describes the initial shock: “astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror”⁵⁶. When encountering a sublime object, the subject is blinded by it “so that he loses touch with logic and reason. When he realizes the strength of the sublime and it’s “potential for overpowering his rationality and control“, he is overcome by “fear and terror”⁵⁷. The most significant feature of the sublime is its ability to make the subject “lose control over himself”⁵⁸.

The sublime terror is related to the gothic in that it “incorporate[s] those forms of sublimity that explore the underworld of the self, particularly that which has been repressed and silenced”⁵⁹. An external sublime impulse forces the mind to “question a unified sense of self”⁶⁰. Immanuel Kant also links the sublime power with the self, however he believed that the entire process was internal. “Sublimity [is] something located in the subject, not in the external realm of nature”⁶¹. Justin D. Edwards explains the feeling of fear as “a vibration of dread that arises when the imagination tries to grasp the unimaginable, the limitless and the unrepresentable”⁶².

David Nye claims the theory of the sublime changed when reaching America. From an individual's experience it became “an element of social cohesion”⁶³. The sublime is “a shared emotion, a group experience”⁶⁴. A place with sublime objects such as the Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon become mass destinations and “come to represent the national spirit”⁶⁵.

54 Edwards 29

55 Edwards 29

56 Edwards 29-30

57 Edwards 30

58 Edwards 30

59 Edwards 30

60 Edwards 30

61 Edwards 31

62 Edwards 31

63 Edwards 32

64 Edwards 32

65 Edwards 32

5. The Trilogy

The Deptford Trilogy contains many themes that fall under the genre of Southern Ontario Gothic, or Gothic in general. Robertson Davies was also influenced by Carl Gustav Jung's philosophy of archetypes while writing it. The narrator of *Fifth Business*, Dunstable Ramsey, recognizes certain archetypes in the other characters, which helps him explain his calling, and also clarifies some of the features of those characters to the reader. The fact that each character represents a different archetype determines their life to a certain degree. That, in turn, influences the various gothic elements that the author designed for them. In other words, the features of Gothic in the three novels are linked to specific characters and situations. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I will discuss the aspects of Gothic that are related to three main characters by describing them. The main characters that have been selected are Dunstable Ramsey, since he is the first narrator and introduces the whole story; Mary Dempster, who forms a link between Ramsey and other characters; and her son Paul Dempster, who represents the supernatural element in the trilogy.

The traditional gothic novel of the eighteenth century consists of specific features which are prominent even in contemporary gothic styles. The original characters, setting and plot create a pattern that in principle remains the same in most of the novels (and therefore to a gothic novel reader predictable). However, it can easily be disguised and varied by the space-time. This is caused by the fact that the three features serve a particular function within the novel due to which the desired gothic 'effect' is reached. A gothic story always includes a dominant character, an innocent female character, a fearful environment etc. so that a certain level of anticipation is built in the readers (who are familiar with the genre). Davies' trilogy uses some of these aspects, and transforms them to suit his design. The most noticeable gothic elements in his novels are characters and setting. His main characters are based on Jung's concept of archetypes. Davies therefore merges the gothic function with the archetypes, which enables to combine the entertaining factor of the gothic with a moral or educational aspect of the archetypes. The categorization of the characters according to the gothic structure allows the reader to anticipate the fates of the characters. In a gothic novel these expectations of the reader would be confirmed because of the opposite's model (ei. the characters are "black or white"). Davies does not agree with this model, he believes that there is good and bad in every individual⁶⁶. However, he can still take advantage of the gothic principle which provokes the reader to making assumptions about the characters.

66 Davies, *The Merry Heart* 136

5.1 Dunstable Ramsey

Dunstable Ramsey, later called Dunstan, was born and raised in Deptford in a traditional family. His father was the owner of the local newspapers, and his strict Presbyterian mother worked in the village. After the birth of Paul Dempster he helps out at the Dempsters, which distances him from his mother. To get away from her influence he enlists in the army despite being under age. During WWI he is badly injured and loses his left leg. After the war he leaves Deptford (he has no relatives there anymore) to teach history at a boy's boarding school in Toronto, where he spends most of his life. As a hobby he travels around Europe to study hagiology. He stays in contact with Mary Dempster and finds her a place in an asylum when there is no-one to take care of her. When he retires he joins Magnus Eisengrim in his castle in Switzerland.

The narrator of the first book must inevitably be the hero of the novels. As a professor of history he demonstrates that he is smart, and his sly comments and jokes at school display his witty humour. Although he does not manage to save the tyrannized Mary Dempster from the unforgiving community, he does ensure that she has where to stay after there is nobody to take care of her. For him, she is his true heroine, and he platonically falls in love with her. The hero always fights with the villain. Ramsay's biggest rival is Percy Boyd Staunton, who threw the snowball, however, there are also other sources of evil in the trilogy, such as corruption, egotism, revenge, greed, and so on. Despite the many opposites that are presented in the novels, Davies's aim is to find a balance between these elements, which differs from the approach of the gothic novel.

Dunstable Ramsey tells the story of his life in order to make clear that he has lived a worthy life in and outside of the school where he had taught history. *Fifth Business* is framed as a letter to the new headmaster, a complaint and testimony of how rich his life has been. It is also an evidence that Canadians do not live dull lives, an opinion common in the beginnings of the 20th century. His narration reveals certain issues which are not known of outside of his environment. Despite Dunstable's story-oriented biased point of view, Davies presents an image of the Canadian society of a specific period which resonates even in following generations.

Through his characters, Robertson Davies writes about many issues related to the identity and history of Canada. Although the plots are not based on Canadian history as such (the story is not about the history of the country), Davies makes use of some important personal and national milestones to draw parallels and contrasts in lives of ordinary people. Essentially, he follows the paths of four characters who come from or are influenced by the

same environment – Deptford. The characters differ in personality, and they each go their own ways, however they individually deal with similar issues. Davies studies their personalities and explores their situations.

Dunstable Ramsey is born into a typical Deptford family. His father manages the newspapers in the village, and his mother is the dominant force in and out the house. Manners, chores and rules must be obeyed based on principle; news of misdemeanours quickly spread around the village, which is bad for reputation. His rivalry with Percy Boyd Staunton (nicknamed Boy), sense of humour and sarcasm, and his poor physical appearance make him a common boy, albeit with potential. His shyness and unassertiveness puts him in a similar situation like Mary or Paul.

The defining event of Dunstable's life is the birth of Paul Dempster. While being attacked by snowballs thrown by Boy, he ducks one of the balls, which consequently hits Mary, pregnant, in the head. The hit causes her to go prematurely into labour. Her son Paul survives, however he is negatively affected for life by the denouncement that his mother has gone simple based on the hit. For Dunstable this is a life-changing moment as he is convinced he is responsible for Paul's birth. He feels guilty despite the illogicality of the account of the incident. Although it was Boy who threw the ball, Dunstable "[is] perfectly sure, you see, that the birth of Paul Dempster, so small, so feeble and troublesome, was [his] fault."⁶⁷ He blames himself for being "so clever, so sly, so spiteful in hopping in front of the Dempsters as Percy Boyd Staunton threw that snowball at [him] from behind"(20). The sense of guilt might have left Dunstable after finding out that the baby was relatively healthy. However, three following notions affirm him in his inescapable guilt.

The first confirmation, so to speak, occurs when Dunstable talks with Boy about the accident.

"The baby came too soon," said I, testing him.

"Did it?" said he, looking me straight in the eyes.

"And you know why," I said.

"No I don't."

"Yes you do. You threw that snowball."

"I threw a snowball at you," he replied, "and I guess it gave you a good smack."

I could tell by the frank boldness of his tone that he was lying.

"Do you mean to say that's what you think?" I said.

"You bet it's what I think," said he. "And it's what you'd better think too, if you know what's good for you."

⁶⁷ Davies, Robertson. *The Deptford Trilogy*. (England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1983) 20. All subsequent references will be cited in the text

We looked into each other's eyes and I knew that he was afraid and I knew also that he would fight, lie, do anything rather than admit what I knew. And I didn't know what in the world I could do about it.

So I was alone with my guilt, and it tortured me.“ (20-21)

Dunstable knows that he and Boy were having an argument which resulted in Boy throwing snowballs at him. Since Boy denies his participation in the accident, Dunstable assumes that it must have been himself who caused it because nobody else was there. Also, the snowball was meant for him. By deduction he places the guilt on himself, although he is aware that Boy is lying. The fact that Boy refuses to take responsibility forces Dunstable to lie because he would be pointed at as the evildoer. Hence he is pressed to be silent about the truth, and accept the guilt alone. “The more time that passed, the less I was able to accuse Percy Boyd Staunton of having thrown the snowball (...). His brazen-faced refusal to accept responsibility seemed to deepen my own guilt, which had now become the guilt of concealment as well as action.“(23)

The second aspect that makes Dunstable believe he is solely guilty is the worsening condition of Mary Dempster. Mrs. Ramsay tells her husband that Mary is not able to take care of her son: “She's quiet and friendly and sweet-natured as she ever was, poor little soul, but she just isn't all there.“(22) At first Dunstable is horrified that he caused her to be ridiculed by the entire village, however he soon finds out that she is far from being simple at that point. As a matter of fact, Dunstable never believes that she would be mad while he is in Deptford. Nevertheless, the tale of Mary Dempster circles the village and ruins the family's reputation.

The third instance of figuring out that he is sure to be guilty is when he realizes that he lied to his parents, and to God. When Mrs. Ramsay wonders whether Dunstable might know more about the accident, his father believes in him: “He knows how serious it is. If he knew anything he'd have spoken up by now“(22). To that, Dunstable's mother replies: “Whoever it was, the Devil guided his hand“(22). Dunstable is terrified, as he is banished twice - by his mother, and by God. “I crept to bed wondering if I would live through the night, and at the same time desperately afraid to die“(22).

In order to ease the guilt inside, Dunstable is determined to make it up to Mary. He visits and helps out at the Dempsters several times a week. He never admits that he knows anything about the mishap to them, his pretext of visiting is that his mother gave him the task as a regular chore. Despite his inner gratification of paying his debt to Mary, Dunstable does suffer by it to a certain degree. Since he spends much of his time at the Dempsters, he cannot be with his friends. What is more, some of the children tease him for going to “the bughouse“(29). This isolates him “being forced out of the world [he] belonged to into the

strange and uncanny world of the Dempsters“(29).

As Dunstable spends more time with Mary, his attitude towards her begins to change. His guilt and need to compensate for his crime turn into affection. The more the community rejects her, the more he becomes “obsessed with her“(28). His love springs from the fact that he feels related and responsible for her fate: “I had made her what she was, and in such circumstances I must hate her or love her. In a mode that was far too demanding for my age or experience, I loved her“(28). Gradually, his platonic love turns into a life-long affection and gratitude. He believes that Mary is in fact a saint, as she performed three miracles. His theory of Mary as a saint brings him to a passion of studying hagiology. He travels through Europe to gather information that would prove that indeed Mary Dempster was holy. This becomes a mission for Dunstable, and devotes many years to this task. Although the research is also a hobby for him, it is clear that his obsession wears him down. His guilt drives him to prove her innocence, however he neglects and sacrifices his own life for it. It is Padre Blazon who points this out to Dunstable: “What good would it do you if I told you she is indeed a saint? I cannot make saints, nor can the Pope. We can only recognize saints when the plainest evidence shows them to be saintly. If you think her a saint, she is a saint to you“(167). Also the guilt that Dunstable has had in him is pointless. “I think you are a fool to fret that she was knocked on the head because of an act of yours. Perhaps that was what she was for, Ramezay“(170-171). Instead of having the world acknowledge that Mary is innocent, and therefore recognize the truth, Dunstable is advised to process it internally. “Who is she? (...) find your answer in psychological truth, not in objective truth“(171). After years of hiding guilt, Dunstable is finally free. He still does not know who Mary is for him, however he makes the first step of finding out, which is finding out who he is himself. He was searching for the identity of Mary Dempster without knowing his own. This situation is similar to the one of the Canadian identity. The memory of the past is vivid and unresolved in the minds of many people, however they cannot decode it without knowing who they are. Without a base, a viewpoint it is impossible to establish a connection to the past. Canada is a multicultural country, therefore it is impossible for people to make an opinion on the past based on available historic sources. Each community and individual has its own history, through which it can relate to the collective concept.

The metaphor of guilt is clearly visible in the novel. Dunstable feels guilty for something he didn't do but that he was apart of. It takes him some forty years to realize that there is not point in finding a solution to make it right, and that he does not need to keep the pain in him forever. What is important is to acknowledge the truth, and come to terms with it.

Similarly, the history of colonization has been haunting the nation. The ancestors of colonizers and the Native peoples live together in one country and remind each other of the violent past. It cannot be changed, however it is an essential part of everybody's identity (even of those who were not directly related to it), therefore it is necessary to understand it and accept it. Hence, in order to overcome the past, one has to first know the self.

An interesting element in the trilogy is Dunstable's fascination with saints. He studies them to find information that would help him prove Mary's sainthood. From a gothic point of view saints are the extreme of a positive character. No other can be more innocent, pure, good. The performance of a miracle is an expression of a good deed that is valued as such, and praised. However even such a classification can be individual and relative. Nevertheless, Dunstable wants Mary to be a saint, as that would be a justification of his platonic love, and a compensation for his guilt. He idolizes her because she symbolizes the good in the world, and brings hope amongst the darkness (just like all saints). Literally, at one point in Dunstable's life in Deptford, she is the only positive element since he has no friends or family to turn to. Her imperfections make her look more human which enables Dunstable to identify with her more.

Dunstable is labelled as the Fifth Business towards the end of the first novel. It is explained as a technical term in theatre, where the figure is "the odd man out, the person who has no opposite of the other sex. (...), the one who knows the secret of the hero's birth, or comes to the assistance of the heroine when she thinks all is lost (...), you cannot manage the plot without Fifth Business!" (219). The point of the fifth business in the novel is of course that he is the narrator, who knows everything. For Dunstable, it is an answer to his life. Once he solves the issue of Mary's sainthood for himself, he has a lot of free time. He questions the purpose of his life, as cannot find out what his purpose is. Liesl (Paul Dempster's "manager" and partner) explains to him that he does not have a special goal to achieve himself, he helps others accomplish theirs. In a way it is a big relief for Dunstable because he is not expected to fulfil anything, therefore he does not have to worry about responsibility, which he did for most of his life because of his feeling of guilt.

5.2 Mary Dempster

Mary moves into Deptford when she marries the Baptist preacher Amasa Dempster. The fact that she is the preacher's wife sets specific expectations from the community, as her position and duties are given. Her role of a newcomer is not easy, and her life in Deptford is

heavily influenced by struggles or tension between her and the society. After she gives birth to her son Paul, the situation does not improve, and eventually leads to her being ostracized from the village and her family. After her son runs away, and her husband dies, she leaves Deptford to live with her aunt near Toronto. Later she is moved by Ramsey to an asylum.

In every gothic novel there is a character of a fine young lady who is kidnapped by an older superior man. The plot is a bit different in the trilogy, however Mary Dempster shares many characteristics with such a character. Mary represents the innocent female who is terrorized, here not by a potential husband, but by the community of her husband. Although she is innocent and inexperienced in some areas, she brings with her an air of novelty which is not accepted easily or at all in the traditional society.

One of the features typical for Southern Ontario Gothic is social critique of the community. Robertson Davies explores this theme mainly in the first novel *Fifth Business*. The plot takes place in the fictional village of Deptford, where the main characters come from (except for Mary Dempster). Deptford is an isolated village which runs by its own rules and rarely accepts changes or new ideas. Although the novel is set in the early half of the twentieth century, it is apparent that the village is out of date and its people's mentality is old-fashioned. Or rather, as if time had stopped there. Since the village is enclosed and isolated, it does not have any other town to be compared with. There are not many impulses that would break the everyday regime of its inhabitants, there are no ambitions to promote or leave the village. The impression is such that there is nothing beyond Deptford, physically and ideologically. This concept of microcosmos is very powerful and can be seen as the basis for several notions that exist in the village.

One of the notions is the division of roles in the society. This is quite common in any literary work, however in Gothic it is emphasized by the contrast of good and bad qualities, which creates tension. The novel describes the lives of only some of the most visible inhabitants of Deptford; the rest are treated as a majority that shares its opinions with the leading figures of the village. Everybody is expected to do as much as they can to participate in the maintenance and progress of Deptford. At the same time, there are some rules that must be followed. The characters have a certain given position in the social hierarchy, and also have to commit to a certain pattern of behaviour depending on age, gender, status in the society, achievements for the community and other criteria. Each person in the village is expected to take on their role. If not, they are expelled from the community and discredited.

The best example of the Deptford small-town customs is the treatment of Mary Dempster. She is the preacher's wife, and therefore is expected to set example for the others

and be active in the community. They see it as her responsibility to accept her role of the preacher's wife, and behave in such a way to represent her husband and guide the society. As a "public" figure Mary is supposed to take on the role of a model or idol, and set an example for the villagers (similarly to her husband). In the eyes of Deptford, however, she fails to do that. They see many faults in her, which does not agree with their idea of who they would be willing to recognize as an authority. Their standard is too high, and does not tolerate imperfection. Mary is expected to perform her duties as if she was born in the village with the experience of a thirty-year-old woman. They suppose her to be close to a hero. However, despite her young age (20 years old) and her inexperience with the village, Mary does not show any distress about her roles. On the contrary, her seeming unfamiliarity brings out the human qualities in her. She is very down-to-earth and sure in her decisions, which the community confuses with ignorance and incapability. Although she does not fulfil the expectations of the society, she stays true to herself.

Amasa Dempster, the preacher in the village, is regarded as a public figure. The choice of his wife, therefore, is not only a personal matter, but also a public one because she will take on the responsibilities associated with his job. From that point of view he is indirectly forced to find a woman suitable enough, rather than somebody he may fall in love with. Her personality, behaviour and appearance must be appropriate. In the case of Amasa Dempster, the villagers do not really approve of his choice of Mary: "She was a nice little thing, but was that soft voice ever going to dominate a difficult meeting of the Ladies' Aid?"(23-24). Although it is Amasa Dempster who brought Mary to the village, the community blames her for her inability to accept her duties. All the negative comments are aimed at her. Furthermore, Mary is never asked to carry out anything by her husband. On the one hand it implies that he does not require her to fulfil the chores the community demands of her, on the other she is thus not supported by him, which consequently worsens her position in the society.

Another aspect which the community does not approve of is how the Dempsters show affection to each other in the beginning of the Dempster's marriage. They believe that expressing love must be done in a manner that complies to social standards. Various stages of courtship allow specific professions of love, and are limited by a time frame. The Dempsters, on the other hand, are very loving to each other, and treat each other according to what they feel regardless of how long they had been together. "The way he looked at her would make you wonder if the man was soft in his head. You would think they were still courting, instead of being expected to get down to the Lord's work and earn his \$550 *per annum*"(23-24). Here

Ramsay expresses his concern over the morality of freely displaying such feelings. The customs of courtship in Deptford are apparently guided, and the fact that the two are meant to be examples to the society is even more disturbing to the society.

The community also has a problem with how the Dempsters are behaving during Mary's pregnancy. It is still regarded as a socially inappropriate condition. A pregnant woman cannot walk around in public freely, she can only go out when it is dark or when there are not many people in the streets. Expecting a child is not considered to be a cheerful event; there is something haunting and startling about it. "When she was pregnant there was a bloom about her that seemed out of keeping with the seriousness of her state; it was not at all the proper thing for a pregnant woman to smile so much, and the least she could have done was to take a stronger line with those waving tendrils of hair that seemed so often to be escaping from a properly severe arrangement"(23-24). Dunstable Ramsey recalls these memories as an adult, yet he noticed them when he was a ten-year-old child. The fact that a young boy would realize such details proves that Mary Dempster's behaviour is quite different from what the village is accustomed to. It also shows how little information the inhabitants and even the village doctor have on medical conditions, and how much they rely on tradition and superstitions.

In the previous quote Ramsay illustrates the duties of a pregnant woman. Mostly they are associated with the notion that pregnancies are viewed as unstately conditions, and hence they should be hidden. During these times women should not be seen in public, and should not draw attention. At the same time, the fact that they are expecting a child does not mean they cannot work. According to Ramsay women carried buckets of water till the 8th month of pregnancy(24). Amasa Dempster helps his wife with her chores because he loves her and wants her to rest. This, however, is not accepted in Deptford. Ramsay even claims that "The hope was widely expressed that Mr. Dempster was not going to make a fool of his wife"(22). This situation is astonishing for two reasons. The first one is the paradox of viewing pregnancies as something mysterious and medically unexplored, yet physical activity and chores are expected to be carried out as usual. It seems that the conceiving and birth of a child are related more to spiritual events rather than with physicality. The second notion is about the strict division of roles. Although Amasa Dempster is helping his wife by carrying the buckets of water because she is expecting a child, from the point of view of the village he is embarrassing her because he does not let her do her work.

In addition to becoming a preacher's wife and accepting responsibilities that come with the post, Mary is also learning to manage chores around the household. Mary Dempster comes from a higher society family, and hence she was not taught how to organize a house on

her own. Due to this lack of knowledge, she is seen as unfit to the task: “Why had Mrs. Dempster’s mother never prepared her for these aspects of marriage? (...) How were you to forge a preacher’s wife from such weak metal as that?”(24). They regard her as being lazy, especially after the birth of her son Paul. “As spring came Mrs. Dempster was perfectly able-bodied but showed no signs of getting down to work. She did a little cleaning and some inept cooking, and laughed like a girl at her failures“(25). The community thinks that she is incapable of learning such practical tasks, and attribute it to her believed simplicity. Her unworldliness is confused with stupidity. Mary, however, acquires a healthy approach of not taking things too seriously, and laughs at her own mistakes. She copes with her inexperience with a light-hearted youthful attitude, which is unthinkable in Deptford.

Mary Dempster does not come from Deptford, which is seen to be a disadvantage in the eyes of the community. While dealing with her new role of a wife, she also has to handle the stigma of a newcomer. As somebody who comes from a different background, Mary Dempster is expected to learn and adapt to the local standard, and be a leading figure for the villagers. They take it for granted that she was brought up in a different way, and that she may bring some new qualities to the benefit of the society. Deptford, however, is not ready to accept novel ideas from a young girl from another community, and therefore they want her to adjust. She is regarded as a threat to the traditional order in Deptford, so to speak. To them, her youthful, revolutionary attitudes could potentially harm the approved ways of life. The tension between Mary and the community reflect many clashes of oppositions typical in gothic literature. She represents the new, young, modern, other, while Deptford stands for traditional, stereotypical, local. Although she is rejected for being overly different, that is not what Mary is aiming for. She just happens to be brought up in higher society in a different manner. She does not want to oppose anything in Deptford, she only stays true to herself as that is how she grew up to be. It is taken for granted that her nature cannot be changed. The society sees her as unfitting, but at the same time the community thinks that she can be shaped, and can pick up a new identity. The fact that she does not change, and is capable to resist the pressure of the community proves that she has a unique personality and that she is a strong person. Deptford misinterprets this as the opposite – a lack of ability, and begin to think she is “simple“.

As has been shown, the village of Deptford is quite strict in terms of social structure and expectations. In a small, isolated environment it is logical that it has certain rules to help it function properly. On the other hand, for a new member of the community these regulations may seem too severe. It may be harsh even for individuals that grow up in the environment. A

lot of pressure is put on them, which can affect them in itself. The environment of an isolated place with a uniform social system can produce an oppressive, haunting climate from which there is no escape. Either the person resists, and manages to rebel against the conservative community, or they are absorbed into it, and lose their identity.

There are several instances in *Fifth Business* when the people of Deptford claim that Mary Dempster is “simple“(25). The first time is when she is hit by the snowball in the head. Several months after Paul is born Mrs. Ramsay expressed her concern that “she just isn’t all there“(22). What turns this opinion into a general belief is when Mary is well enough to take up other chores, apart from caring for her child, and the way she is around the house. “(...) she lacked the solemnity they expected of a nursing mother (...) and sometimes when they went into the house there she was, with everything showing, even though her husband was present, as if she hadn’t the sense to pull up her clothes“(25).

The second incident that makes the village think Mary is mad is when she wanders off and is found in the pit on the edge of Deptford with a tramp. She causes outrage when she replies to her husband that she did it because the tramp “was so civil“ and “wanted it [sex] so badly“(45). Her permission leads them to believe she is crazy: “Supposing she was a little off her head, how insane had a woman to be before it came to that? Dr. McCausland (...) said that such conduct indicated a degeneration of the brain, which was probably progressive“(46).

The disgrace that follows forces the Dempsters to move outside the village in to seclusion. They visit the village only on Sundays to church. Amasa Dempster leaves his post and finds a manual job at one of the farms. He also changes his attitude towards Mary. He does not seem to trust her anymore, and ties her on a rope in the house so that she cannot walk around outside as she used to. The new circumstances are hard for both of them, however Mary “[begins] to look strange indeed, and if she was not mad before, people said, she was mad now“(49).

Despite the seriousness of the second event I would like to argue that the downfall of Mary Dempster was not caused by the thrown snowball, but by the behaviour and conduct of the society in Deptford. She is new to the local ways and does not fit in with her personality or appearance. Although the community is patient and helps her integrate to a certain degree, there is no word about what is expected of her from them or from her husband. There seems to be a lack of communication. Deptford is run by a stereotype where many things are automatic. Laws and social rules have been in place for years, therefore everybody knows what to do. Mary, however, is new to them, and cannot guess the things she is not told.

Mary is faulted for many things that are actually not wrong. Her appearance and

behaviour are a matter of upbringing which form a part of her identity. She should not be criticised for her “lack of aesthetic sense“(23) or the way she (un)dresses in front of her husband. In other words, the community does not distinguish between elements of her personality and upbringing, and behaviour. They judge her based on anything she does that is not in accordance to their customs.

Deptford condemns Mary for her behaviour ever since she arrives to the village, therefore nobody really knows what she is like. Only Dunstable realizes her potential when he secretly visits her at her house. He understands that she is not simple-minded as others believe her to be. On the contrary, she has “a breadth of outlook and a clarity of vision that [are] strange and wonderful“(49). Unlike the critically-minded villagers who see the bad in everything, “she [has] a lack of fear, (...) of assumption that whatever happened was inevitably going to some worse state of affairs“(50). Her attitude is not as restricted to rules, and views matters from the bright side: “When she had seemed to be laughing at things her husband took very seriously, she had been laughing at the disproportion of his seriousness“(50). Her reactions are misinterpreted as those of a “fool“(50), when in fact she only has a different opinion. Her inner faith and beliefs make her strong to endure the injustices of the community for some time. When Paul runs away, and her husband dies, she stays alone. She then goes to stay with her aunt in Toronto.

From Dunstable’s recollections it is apparent that Mary is not completely insane. Her inner strength and optimism protects her from the accusations of the village. However, the fact that she is not accepted in the community, and does not want to fully integrate with the rest is a sign that something is not ideal. Her potential of bringing a new impulse to Deptford is unused. Her gradual retreat away from the inhabitants marks her downfall. Gradually, she does lose her mind. The isolation she is forced to stay in makes her think of all the memories of her family, she only remembers “horrible mixed up memories of being tied up, and Paul disappearing, and Amasa - she always remembers him with a blue mouth, like a rotten hole in his face - telling God he forgave her for ruining his life“(136). She reflects the attitude of the community, and serves as a mirror to their intolerance and unwillingness to compromise. The aggressive environment of social stereotype and oppression works as the evil element which destroys the character of the heroine in the trilogy. Although female heroines are usually saved in gothic novels, Mary is rescued only in that she escapes the village; her memories haunt her for the rest of her life.

5.3 Paul Dempster

From the three main characters Paul Dempster evolves the most. His life is a very adventurous one. At the age of nine, following a not too happy childhood, he runs away from Deptford to join a circus show. He spends about fifteen years with his mentor Willard (who abuses him), until Willard's death. Then he travels to London, and works as a double in a small traditional theatre, with which he goes for a trip to Canada. He then searches for a job in Switzerland, and is employed by a Swiss aristocrat to mend a collection of toys. There he meets Liesl, who helps him create his own circus show, with which they then travel the world. He retires in Liesl's castle together with her and Ramsey.

Paul Dempster alias Magnus Eisengrim is the trickster of the story. The figure of a trickster is more of a mythical one, however it combines even a darker side which resembles the devil or tyrant. Davies models Paul into an essentially positive character, who gains a sense of power that he is able and willing to use against anybody who would doubt him. He demonstrates this authority when he takes revenge on his mentor Willard. He also manages to create a charismatic aura around him that makes him respectable, and almost aristocratic. His character is associated with the world of magic, which brings the element of the supernatural in to the trilogy.

There are several gothic aspects in the life of Paul Dempster. As a child he is faulted by the society for the wrong-doings of his mother, which inevitably influences him from an early age. Consequently, he is kidnapped and fostered by a magician, who conceals the abduction by giving Paul a new identity. Throughout his life, Paul alternates several identities which prevents him to be who he really is or wants to be. Lastly, the environment of the circus that gives Paul refuge is depicted as a setting where reality merges with the unexplained. In the following pages I will discuss the notions of the small-town curse of prejudice and condemnation, Paul's various identity evolutions, and the supernatural elements in the trilogy.

Paul Dempster is born to Mary and Amasa Depster in Deptford. These three factors significantly influence his life. His mother was a victim of the society's strict exclusivity which leads the family to being first pitied, then ignored, and later ostracized. Although it is Mary whom the community does not accept, unfairly the curse is transferred even onto Paul. This leads to him growing up without any friends, and people, especially children, calling him names. He essentially has no self-confidence. Since he does not have any friends and his family is poor, his life is very stereotypical. Most of his days consist of school and learning verses from the Bible. With such a reputation there are not many prospects for Paul in

Deptford. He would most probably become a preacher like his father, who taught him from the Book of Psalms every day. His childhood is quite bleak until Dunstable Ramsey shows him a trick with cards. Paul is enchanted, and gradually learns more tricks which he masters like a professional. When a circus comes to Deptford, he secretly visits the show. His fascination continues to such a degree, that when he is kidnapped by Willard, he never questions his departure from the town.

Paul's leaving from the town is the only solution for him to escape the same fate that his mother has. It is improbable that Paul would ever be respected by the community. His only asset is his knowledge of the Bible, and it is questionable whether Deptford would accept and trust a man with such a family background. Although the social condemnation of the Dempsters can be interpreted as a curse by the family, the town has a different approach. Possibly for decades the villagers live in an isolated world with the same rules. They feel morally compelled to protect themselves from dangers in any form, including inappropriate behaviour which could potentially harm their children. Since Deptford never accepts Mary into the community, Paul does not belong there either. As the Dempsters are not supported, they cannot even move to a different town to escape it. The actions and behaviour of Deptford therefore has a direct impact on Paul's identity.

Paul is never given a chance to prove that he is worth attention. Nothing good is expected of him and he is ignored. In his position he is powerless. What attracts him to the circus initially is the ability to captivate the audience: "He was laughing at us, for having been deceived. What power! What glorious command over lesser humanity!"(542). With his mind set on gaining such power, he does not doubt his flight from the village. Although he tries to forget his life in Deptford, he is unsuccessful and the label of an unimportant nobody stays with him for decades.

The curse that was cast on him never leaves him. Although he departs from Deptford, and returns once (without being recognized), the stigma of being nothing follows him all his life. It is not only the fact that he came from a dysfunctional family in some small unknown town in Canada, it is related to the issue of Canada in general. Canada at the time is not known for anything, its image is too vague to be recognized or remembered. Paul decides to capture the world to gain the attention he never had.

On his journey towards fame and appreciation, Paul takes on several identities. Whenever he enters a new environment he gets a new one. As he grows older the identities become more complex, however, with experience from his previous ones he learns to make

advantage of them for himself. The identities he acquires are not always ones he chooses. Often he is given an identity which he is forced to accept. There are discrepancies in what he is labelled and what he actually feels to be. In this section the identities of Paul Dempster will be analyzed.

Paul's life is a journey to find an identity. The novels follow an evolution of his search to discover his inner true self and his outer assigned masks. This development is effective in that there is a clear progress in his gaining power and self-respect and authority. The transformation shows the importance of having and controlling one's identity. The situation in the beginning is one that is familiar to Canada. Many Canadians do not know anything about their ancestry, although they are aware that it influences them to a certain extent. (dopsat)

The first identity he has is Paul Dempster, born in Deptford to the Baptist preacher and his so-called 'crazy' wife. His identity is based on the behaviour and action of his parents, and on his appearance. Thus, he is condemned by the community from the day he was born based on the reputation of his parents and his looks. Dunstan Ramsey recalls his mother talk about the fact that as a baby Paul was ugly:

My mother was not to dwell on unsightly or macabre things, but she spoke of Paul's ugliness to my father with what was almost fascination. He was red, of course; all babies are red. But he was wrinkled like a tiny old man, and his head and his back and much of his face were covered with weedy long black hair. His proportions were a shock to my mother, for his limbs were tiny and he seemed to be all head and belly. His fingers and toes were almost without nails. His cry was like the mewing of a sick kitten. (18)

Paul is seen as a "hideous, misshapen child"(19) even at an older age. To Deptford he is basically a non-human, a freak. In his words he was "a misfit in the world, and didn't know why"(538). He is either ignored or bullied by the boys in the village "from the earliest days [he] can remember"(538). His identity consists of the identity of his parents, hence he basically has no identity at all. What Deptford associates with him are empty characteristics that do not refer to his inner self in any way. Although appearance is important in creating an identity, at a child of 9 years it should not be a major trait. He says that he "simply accepted the wretchedness of [his] station"(538) at the time. His future in Deptford is therefore predicted, and thus limited. "My mother had done something-I never found out what it was-that made most of the village hate her, and the children knew that, so it was all right to hate me and torture me"(538). This hereditary curse of being condemned by the society is a trigger for upcoming new identities. Since Paul does not have an identity while being brought up, he

lacks a confident personality which in turn makes him vulnerable in being labeled with an identity. The given identity impacts Paul greatly throughout his life, as it takes him several decades before he learns who he is.

After Paul is kidnapped by Willard he becomes a part of the Wanless's World of Wonders circus. The act of Abdullah, a machine playing cards with people from the audience, is revived, and Paul works the machine hidden inside it. He gets two new identities, the one of Abdullah, and as Cass Fletcher when he is not performing. His role as Abdullah is more significant, because it gives a good idea of what Paul Dempster really is for most of his life. While performing as "the soul of Abdullah"(563) Paul becomes invisible: "When I was in Abdullah, I was Nobody. I was an extension and a magnification of Willard; (...) I was something to be gawped at, but quickly forgotten, by the spectators. But as Paul Dempster I did not exist. I had found my place in life, and it was as Nobody"(569). Paul has to shed his original identity so that he is not recognized. Again, he is given a certain role that he must fulfil, which limits his true self. It happens several times that Paul is actually forgotten in Abdullah, and therefore is unnoticed and invisible even by the circus crew. At the same time he is very important, because Abdullah is the headline of the show. He is literally trapped in the new identity ('Abdullah' translates as 'servant'), and is not allowed to be himself, or be who he wants to be. He is treated as an object, a thing, rather than a person. He is smart and ambitious, however, and is eager to advance. Despite learning mechanics and other things to be useful other than as a machine operator, he at first finds that he is not used to being independent of Willard. After ten years of touring, however, with Willard becoming too unreliable to perform on stage, Paul gets his chance to perform some tricks on his own. He quickly masters his art, and Abdullah becomes redundant, and a burden to transport. Paul decides to burn it, which turns out to be a moment of freedom for him: "That was the end of Abdullah, and the happiest moment of my life up to then was when I saw the flames engulf the ugliest of images"(638).

His next identity is as Faustus LeGrand, a prolongation of his identity of Abdullah after he destroys it. Although Paul creates this identity, it is mostly a mirror of Willard's identity, therefore he is not really himself again. Willard is no longer able to perform as a magician due to his morfium addiction and so their roles are reversed, and Paul has to take care of him. He takes a place in *Le grand Cirque forain de St. Vite* as a conjurer, and stages Willard as *Le Solitaire des forêts*, a madman from the forest. This is the first time in his life that he is in charge of his own life, and can display his talents to the audience. He is limited by Willard, whom he "thoroughly hated by now"(642). It is also a period when the darker

sides of Paul begin to show. Although he is not capable of killing him, he is aware of the pain Willard is experiencing, and is enjoying it. “Yes, gentlemen, it was Revenge, and it was sweet. (...) I didn’t kill him. Instead I withheld death from him, and it was balm to my spirit to be able to do it.” (644) After Willard dies, Paul is set free from his identity of Abdullah, the nobody who was abused and neglected by his mentor. Although he destroyed Abdullah some time ago, the identity is extended to Willard who operated the machine from outside, hence he got rid of the physical prison, but the psychological oppression came from Willard. “But he was dead, and I was free. Had I not been free for years? Free since I struck the head of Abdullah? No; freedom does not come suddenly. One has to grow into it. But now that Willard was dead, I felt truly free, and I hoped that I might throw off some of the unpleasant characteristics I had taken upon myself but not, I hoped, forever taken within myself.” (645)

In his twenties Paul works in a London theatre. He acts as a double for Sir John Tresize, an old-fashioned Romantic actor who does not want to retire. Sir John is staging *Scaramouche*, and later *The Master of Ballantrae*, Paul’s job is to perform stunts for Sir John that he is too old to do on his own. Paul is chosen for the part because he “has the splendid qualification of having very little personality” (678). His lack of identity makes him ideal for pretending to be somebody else. The other reason why Paul is chosen is his resemblance to Sir John. Apart from the physical similarities, Paul is very much like the older actor when he was young. “He looks like everything inside [Sir John] that [he has] choked off and shut out in order to be what [he is] now” (682). It is apparent that this troubles Sir John, however the desire to succeed with the play is bigger. What Paul lacks from Sir John is his behaviour and gestures, which are essential for the audience to believe the trick. Hence, Paul becomes another identity, this time Sir John Tresize.

Paul gets into the same situation as with Abdullah; he pretends to be somebody else, and at the same time he is forced to adopt a new non-stage name for himself. His French name does not suit his role of an assistant to a stage manager, it could cause too much attention, therefore he is called Mungo Fetch. The name comes about in the same way like his previous one of Cass Fletcher – it is given to him by somebody else while Paul has no time to react. “I was like someone living in a dream. I was active and occupied and heard what was said to me and responded reasonably, but nevertheless I seemed to be in a lowered state of consciousness. Otherwise, how could I have put up with ... a name nobody in his right mind would want to possess?” (699)

Paul is reluctant to become somebody else again after his previous bad experience: “Was this to be another Abdullah?” (697). When he realizes that his parts in the plays are

important for the image Sir John is trying to present, he becomes more enthusiastic. Yet he is aware that he is not entitled to any credit for his stunts, again he is “anonymous and at the same time conspicuous“(697).

Similarly to the Abdullah identity, Paul becomes invisible on stage and outside of it. As he is a double, he is not an actor, therefore he is not accepted among the actors. Mungo Fetch helps with the stage, however even among that company he is ignored. “‘What do you think of your Mungo now?’ said Frank, and once again they began to talk exactly as if I were not standing beside them, busy with a time-sheet“(702). Clearly, they created the name Mungo Fetch and view the character of Mungo in the same way, as an imaginary identity. Since the identity is created by a group of people, it is not easy to accept it for the community nor for Paul. At the same time Paul has no identity of his own. He banished the one of Paul Dempster, and otherwise is the double of Sir John. He returns to his status of Nobody. At the same time, the identities that he is forced on have a rising tendency. In the first one of Paul Dempster he is ignored; in Abdullah he becomes a robot, a thing; in his phase of Faustus LeGrand he is very close to an animal; and in the role of a double he finally becomes a person, despite an invisible one.

His role of being the double for John Tresize turns into an identity for Paul. He is supposed to act his stunts, however it is difficult for Paul to perform like Sir John. The advice he is given is to “be“ him, “try to find the rhythm, try to get inside Sir John“(683). As a result, Paul studies Sir John’s gestures and behaviour, and gradually adopts them as his own on stage and off stage. He becomes a second John Tresize, or rather what he was like in his twenties. “‘You know damned well you’re the living image of the Guvnor [a nickname of Sir John] in that outfit.“(703), “‘You’re as like the Guvnor as if you were spit out of his mouth. You’re his fetch, right enough.“, “‘Dinna say that, haven’t I told you it’s uncanny?““(703). At this moment even Paul realizes the absurdity of the situation: “‘But I began to understand, and I was as horrified as Macgregor. The impudence of it! Me, looking like the Guvnor!““(703) Davies is very creative, and every name he gives to a character is founded on its etymology. In the case of Paul’s new surname Fetch, it means literally “to fetch, obtain“, but also “to grasp, sieze, contain“⁶⁸. Macgregor, the stage manager, explains what a fetch is:“‘If a man met a creature like himself in a lane, or in town, maybe, in the dark, it was a sure sign of death“(698). In other words “an apparition, specter, a double“⁶⁹. Correctly, Macgregor predicts a bad end for

68 Harper, Douglas. Online Etymology Dictionary. 2001-2012. 18 Apr 2012.

http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=fetch&allowed_in_frame=0

69 Harper, Douglas. Online Etymology Dictionary. 2001-2012. 18 Apr 2012.

http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=fetch&allowed_in_frame=0

Sir John, as the only way Paul can exit his new identity is by the death of its true possessor.

Mungo Fetch becomes Sir John's shadow. He becomes so accurate in portraying John Trezise even when not on stage, that it becomes uncanny. What is odd about the situation is that Mungo is modelling himself on an actor who himself had idolized and 'remained' in the previous artistic generation. As Ingestree, one of the minor characters, points out to Paul: "But atleast I was living in 1932, but you were aping a man who was still living in 1902, and if there hadn't been a very strong uncanny whiff about you you'd have been a total freak"(721). With his ability to become Sir John, Paul begins to destroy him. Paul explains that his method of becoming like John Trezise was to learn from his ego "because [he] saw how invaluable that egoism was. Nobody can steal another man's ego, but he can lean from it, and [he] learned "(722). Ingestree, who was in the company together with Paul, recalls the effects of Paul's role: "you ate poor old Sir John. You ate him down to the core", "Your emulation, as you call it, sucked the pith out of that poor old ham, and gobbled it up and made it part of yourself. It was a very nasty process."(722)

Paul Dempster begins the downfall of Willard by destroying Abdullah. Several years later his accurate portrayal of Sir John as his double leads to the doom of John Trezise. The process of destroying the two men is initiated by harming their egos – Willard was proud of his great invention of Abdullah, and Sir John's ego is precisely what Paul took. As Cecelia Coulas writes in her essay "What Is Known of Old and Long Familiar: The Uncanny Effect in *World of Wonders*", the destruction of Paul's mentors is foreshadowed by their illnesses which causes them to be absent in their shows. In spite of their absences Paul performs his parts which symbolically demonstrates his independence and surpassing of the two. The "release from his role as shadow" is completed when Paul is "mistaken at Sir John's graveside for 'some sort of ghost from the past, and very probably an illegitimate son'(778)⁷⁰.

The last identity Paul accepts is the only one he creates. Magnus Eisengrim is his stage persona, which he adopts as his new self. Since it is designed for himself, he does not need to escape it like his previous identities. Although this identity is tailored for him, it is still primarily a stage name, therefore there are many characteristics connoted with it that do not apply to Magnus off stage. The word *magnus* in Latin means 'great, great person, noble man, man of wealth', which are qualities that Paul always wanted to be. Hence this first name is chosen deliberately to impress the audience, and people who meet him. It also sums up what Magnus, or in this case Paul, managed to achieve throughout his life. By working in so many

70 Coulas, Cecelia. "What Is Known of Old and Long Familiar: The Uncanny Effect in *World of Wonders*." *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne* [Online], 15.2 (1990): n. pag. Web. 16 Aug. 2012

environments, with people of various standards, he manages to utilise his experience and create a new identity out of it. All the qualities he acquires are positive and negative, as nobody is perfect, however he does invent a compact realistic character. Although Paul's identity is meant to be a stage name, he puts into it everything he wanted to be, impress by and scare his enemies with. As it is his dream to be that person, he adopts it as his own permanently, he becomes his alter ego.

Paul Dempster's life is a journey full of search for recognition and identity. Despite the clear memories of his hometown, Paul paradoxically has to become successful in order to find out who he truly is. The search for the self is a common theme in Canadian literature, and it is illustrated even in Davies' novels that it is not enough to know the name of one's birth village to understand who one is. There are "ghosts of the past" that pass on to generations, and are not easily explained or justified. At the same time it is impossible to escape them, because avoiding them is not a solution.

The element of the supernatural is traditional in Gothic literature. It is not typical of Southern Ontario Gothic, however it is not uncommon. Robertson Davies uses the circus and theatre as the source of the supernatural in his trilogy. The concept of the circus is based on performances of the circus group which are extraordinary for viewers who are not trained or skilled in such ways. Their acts evoke awe and admiration. Similarly, the aim of Sir John's plays is to arouse surprise and astonishment. Both the forms of performances are meant as entertainment for the audience, which appreciates the ability to display a show that allows them to escape the present and marvel about magic and wonderful scenes.

The audience explains the tricks as supernatural. They are fascinated by magicality of the acts, and do not understand the logic of them, therefore they are at awe. Paul Dempster is also enchanted by Ramsay's tricks before he learns how to do them. The concept of the circus is based on illusion and otherness. The tricks are designed to beguile the viewers in thinking that there is a higher power involved, however the acts are usually based on simple mechanical skills. Quite often the audience is aware that they are being deceived, yet the fascination overrules the necessity for logic. It is similar to the sublime; although the theory is related to the notion of nature, the important aspect is the feeling of wonder that suppresses the need to analyze and understand.

Paul Dempster soon finds out that what he used to admire is only an illusion. At first he is driven by his ambition to learn everything, and the privilege of being a part of this magical world. Once that is done it all becomes a routine. He says "Very soon I became aware

that the World of Wonders which had been a revelation to me, and I suppose to countless other country village people, was a weary bore to the Talent. This is the gnawing cancer of carnival life: it is monstrously boring“(568). The problem of boredom in the circus is that it cannot be escaped. Most of the performers are either people who cannot find or do not want another job. For Willard it would be problematic to find a job without raising suspicion over his addiction and morals. Charlie, the co-owner of the circus, is an American avoiding military service. Happy Hannah the Fat Lady is a fat lady, who could hardly do anything else for a living, for here she gets paid for being fat and sitting in a chair. Andro the Hermaphrodite is actually a man who pretends to be half woman, however his entire personality is affected by the duality, which would also cause commotion in a conservative environment. These characters are outcasts of the society. They would have trouble living in the real world just like Paul did when he was in Deptford.

These unusual characters embrace their otherness and take advantage of them in their performances. The circus presents everything that is out of the ordinary – abilities, qualities and inventions. The audience is amazed by the hermaphrodite or the magician because they are in another world, environment at the time. In reality they would not be so enthusiastic. Nevertheless this contrast illustrates the power of illusion that the circus is able to create.

5. Conclusion

Robertson Davies wrote *The Deptford Trilogy* between 1970 and 1975. The novels follow the lives of Dunstable Ramsay, Mary Dempster, Paul Dempster and other figures from fictional Deptford in Canada. The author captures the adventures and misfortunes of the characters, and explores their ways of dealing with their complex fates. Despite the fact that the novels are not structured as gothic ones, some features of the genre are apparent in the trilogy. Gothic discourse distinguishes among regional variations of the genre; Canadian literature has developed the sub-genre of Southern Ontario Gothic. Elements of Gothic and Southern Ontario Gothic are included in the novels. In this paper I attempted to analyze the features of the two gothic discourses in the trilogy.

Canadian literature serves as an ideal platform for application of gothic elements. Although Davies uses typical features of Southern Ontario Gothic, this branch of the gothic incorporates elements related only to the plot. Therefore the basic and formal aspects of the genre he uses, such as setting, the sublime or the grotesque come from the original approach to gothic literature. This does not mean that the Southern Ontario Gothic elements would differ significantly from those used in earlier gothic novels. As has been shown, these elements refer to issues dealt with in the area (be it the region of Ontario, or extended to the whole of Canada), however, the general effect they create is very similar to that of typical gothic, or even the same. The most common formal gothic features displayed in the trilogy are the sublime, setting, grotesque, characters, and issue of split identity.

Geographically, Canada offers a variety of environments which bear the potential of being considered gothic. The sublime usually takes advantage of surroundings such as landscape and waters of remarkable sizes. Davies, however, chooses to demonstrate the sublime on the background of the circus. Although the concept of the circus is not as powerful as that of nature, the power of the sublime to suspend one's sense of logic remains still visible. The point of the sublime in the circus is not to question the self, or experience a feeling of fear, but rather to let the spectator see art or tricks that are so breath-taking that the viewers are temporarily carried away from the reality of the everyday world.

Settings in gothic literature are essential for evoking an oppressive atmosphere. The castle is possibly the most common gothic scenery, and even Eisengrim decides to live in one. In Davies' novels, however, the castle is not meant to reflect or inspire danger and violence (despite it being the scene of Liesl's rage); it is rather a symbol of tradition, ancestry and the ancient. The castle of Sogenfrei is located in Switzerland since there are no historical

buildings of similar age and magnitude in Canada. Nevertheless, its purpose of evoking respect and historical feeling remains the same.

The grotesque is apparent mostly in the visual descriptions of some of the characters. Many of the circus members have distorted bodies and are ugly, serving a mixed purpose of frightening and humouring the reader. In the trilogy, however, they also arouse pity as the reason they are part of the circus is that they are outsiders who are not and cannot be accepted by society. They are portrayed as monsters, and condemned solely for their appearance. It is a paradox that on the one hand the theme of identity is such a central one for the gothic, and yet the characters are discriminated against based on external features such as appearance, fashion or even gender.

The gothic discourse uses characters that are based on a stereotype. There are always characters such as the innocent female or the violent noble male. The given traits of these characters can make them seem somewhat shallow, as they lack variety, and provoke a level of prejudice in the reader. Davies founds his characters on the archetypes of Carl Gustav Jung. Although the archetypes may also serve as stereotypes, in this case they add depth to the classical gothic dimension. Thus the anticipation and prejudice of the gothic characteristics is combined with that of the features of the archetypes.

The issue of identity is common for gothic and Canadian literature. While the gothic stresses the split personality and the psychology of the character which is tormented by the imbalance and incompatibility of good and evil, Canadian literature questions the existence of the self. Figuratively, the unstable identity is shattered horizontally in the case of gothic, or vertically as in the Canadian context. In Southern Ontario Gothic characters are either unsure of who they are, and have a rather vague identity, or on the contrary they have more than one. In the case of Paul Dempster his identities run to an extreme as he has several, and yet he feels like a nobody anyway. In result both of these types of split identity essentially revolve around psychology as the identity comes from inside the character, and cannot be created to survive without being based on the existing character traits.

Southern Ontario Gothic deals with issues in specific regional environments, therefore it is based on real or realistic events. Many of the themes Davies explores in his trilogy relate to Canada, and not only the province of Ontario. Given the fact that Canadian culture is linked to history as well as relations among its multicultural inhabitants, there are points which remain unresolved due to the many viewpoints such a diverse population inevitable holds. Recurring themes that can be found in Canadian literature include the feeling of guilt and

small-town customs. Some authors also use elements of the supernatural, as they add a degree of depth and mystery to the reality.

Guilt is not a common theme as such, however, in the Canadian context it is seemingly unavoidable. It reflects unsettled issues from the past which outreach to the present. Consequently, guilty thoughts haunt the characters until these find the courage to resolve them and come to terms with them. Interestingly, Ramsay's guilt is transformed into platonic love that he feels for a ghost figure he himself created in the form of the saintly character of Mary Dempster. He keeps reminding himself of his guilt, which in fact is unjustified, by pursuing the sainthood of the person he harmed. There are many other sources and ways of describing guilt. Nevertheless, what they usually share is that the guilt is distributed amongst a community, yet the individuals deal with it on their own, not collectively. The reason why the guilt returns to haunt the characters is that the original problem is uncomfortable to deal with, therefore tabooed, and forgotten.

One of the most important traits of Southern Ontario Gothic is social pressure based on critique. Small-town customs represent evil committed by a community on the individual. This replaces the typical gothic concept of a male character imprisoning a female in his castle in an isolated place. The effect is the same, an unwelcoming society creates an unbearable atmosphere for the victim to be in, and eventually tortures them psychologically. The difference is that a community cannot be accused of a crime, therefore the violence is mental, gradual, and somewhat legal. At the same time it must be stressed that such conduct does not necessarily have to be deliberate. It is difficult to judge the morality of such action, the outcome, however, is the same.

The last significant theme I have chosen in the *Deptford trilogy* is the supernatural. In Davies' novels this is represented by the circus and magic. Although the magic element is used in several ways, in essence it deals with the psychology of the human mind. According to Paul Dempster the key to magic lies in illusions and tricks. He proves that once the principles of the tricks are revealed, the mystery disappears, the illusions lose their appeal and become routine. Most illusions are based on simple logic or mechanisms, which are designed and embellished to deceive spectators. The trick itself is not overly important; it is rather the inexplicable outcome, that produces the magical effect of the show. The purpose is to entertain, to temporarily create a new reality which enables the viewers to escape from their everyday lives. Hence, the aim is to evoke such an inspiring environment that would capture the audience's attention for a given period of time. The objective of gothic literature is not dissimilar. With the help of narrative, characters, setting and plot, gothic novels present a

fictional world that amuses the readers by targeting their emotions. Davies and gothic novels use narrative techniques of depicting the plot as an experience, which allows the reader to personally relive what the characters undergo, thus reaching the desired emotions. The personal aspect is important since that is the source of power over imagination.

Davies' trilogy was written in a time when the Canadian nation was only discovering its identity. Unlike traditional gothic novels, Davies makes an effort to include as much information as possible in order to educate. In other words the emphasis is not only on entertainment but on inspiring Canadians to search for their own identity, or perhaps identities?

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