DISCERNING THE CONTEMPORARY GNOSTIC SPIRIT

IN THE NOVELS OF ROBERTSON DAVIES

BY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is intended to demonstrate the presence of a contemporary gnostic spirit in the novels of Robertson Davies.

The dominance of Protestant puritanism in English Canadian culture is a frequent theme in the literature of the nation. In his writing, Robertson Davies counters the repressive dynamics of a society shaped by puritanism with an appeal to an alternate vision. This vision, which places great value on self-knowledge, bears a strong affinity to the precepts of the ancient gnostics.

Davies' critique of an English Canadian context which appears to place higher value on morality than on spiritual adventures can be compared to the gnostic rejection of the material world in favour of knowledge of the inner self in relation to the divine.

The commitment to gnosis as a means of escape from a repressive environment to one of spiritual freedom is another mark of the connection between Davies' novels and the gnostic spirit.

The presence of revealer figures who initiate their hearers into the way of gnosis is found in both the writings of the ancient gnostics and in the novels of Robertson Davies.

Davies' treatment of the concepts of dualism, the nature of evil and human destiny bears a closer relationship to the

ideas found in gnostic literature than to the doctrines of
Judeo-Christian orthodoxy.

Finally, Davies' emphasis on the importance of the
individual in the quest for self-knowledge reflects a gnostic
suspicion of communal values.

The identification of the relationship between Davies'
writing and the spirit of gnosticism provides a good case
study of the way in which theological notions influence and
are influenced by a particular cultural context.

ABSTRAIT

Cette dissertation a pour but de démontrer la présence
d'un esprit gnostique dans les romans de Robertson Davies.

La prédominance du puritanisme protestant dans la
culture canadienne anglaise est un thème fréquent dans la
litérature nationale. Dans ses écrits, Robertson Davies
décrit la dynamique répressive d'une société modèlée par la
puritanisme en offrant une vision différente. Cette vision,
qui accorde beaucoup d'importance à la connaissance de soi,
s'apparente beaucoup aux préceptes des anciens gnostiques.

La critique de Davies du contexte canadien anglais,
laquelle semble donner plus d'importance à la moralité qu'aux
aventures spirituelles, peut être comparée au rejet gnostique
du materialisme en faveur de la connaissance de son fort
intérieur en relation avec le divin.

L'adhérance au _gnosis_ comme moyen d'évasion d'un
environnement répressif pour un de liberté spirituelle est un

autre exemple de la relation entre les romans de Davies et
l'esprit gnostique.

La présence de figures révélatrices qui initient leur
auditeurs au <u>gnosis</u> se retroune à la fois dans les écrits des
anciens gnostiques et dans les romans de Robertson Davies.

L'approche de Davies concernant le concept de dualité,
entre la nature du mal et la destinée humair s'apparente
d'avantage aux idées retrounees dans la litei jre gnostique
qu'aux doctrines de l'orthodoxie judéo-chrétienne.

Finalement, l'emphase que Davies met sur l'importance de
l'individu dans sa quête de la connaissance de soi reflète un
docete gnostique des valeurs communautaires.

L'identification de la relation entre les écrits de
Davies et l'esprit du gnosticisme nous fournie une étude de
cas de la façon par laquelle la litérature peut être utilisée
par les théologiens afin de discerner comment les notions
théologiques influençent, et sont influençées par un contexte
culturel particulier.

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Thesis

This dissertation finds its genesis in two interests of the author. The first is the concern of contemporary Christian theology for context--the identification of the influence of time and place on theological discourse. This interest finds a more particular focus in the English Canadian culture and the way in which it informs the religious sensibilities of the members of that culture. The second phenomenon prompting this work is the relationship between literature and theology. Story-telling as a way of understanding God and the self is an ancient praxis which has been the subject of considerable modern analysis. As the concern for context is focused on English Canadian culture, so the exploration of the relationship between literature and theology is limited in this work to English Canadian literature.

These two interests have a natural affinity. The concern for context leads to the necessity of an ongoing dialogue between a world bound by time and space and talk about God. Literature, in the modern era, has become an increasingly frequent vehicle which can give shape to the dialogue. Flannery O'Connor suggests:

> If the novelist is doing what
> as an artist he is bound to do,
> he will inevitably suggest that
> image of ultimate reality as
> it can be glimpsed in some
> aspect of the human situation.
> In this sense, art reveals,
> and the theologian has learned
> that he can't ignore it.
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The "image of ultimate reality" which is "glimpsed in some aspect of the human situation" is the concern of both the theologian seeking the relationship between context and theology and the theologian who finds a bond between theology and literature in the potential of both to reflect the tension between essence and existence.

The contextual nature of theology blended together with the relationship between theology and literature and cast in a uniquely English Canadian mold requires more refining. In order to pursue these interests in a fashion that avoids imprecise generalizations about Canadian literature, culture and theology, particular theological and literary themes need to be identified. A narrowing of focus upon the dynamics of the culture occurs when the work of one novelist provides the material for the theologian's reflection upon the relationship between context and theology. Characters seen from the unique vantage point of an individual novelist raise questions which will cause the theologian to concentrate upon that dynamic in the Christian tradition which encompasses best the primary concern of the novelist. A dissertation which limits its discourse to an examination of one novelist and the theological questions and statements prompted by his or her writing produces a case study which, while limited by the exclusion of themes not relevant to the novelist in question, does open a window on the ways in which the interplay between context, the literature of that context and theology can occur.

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The case study undertaken by this dissertation involves the novels of Robertson Davies. The picture of English Canadian culture which emerges from the writings of Robertson Davies will define that part of the context which is to be examined in detail. The theological thrust of the case study involves a critical examination of the ways in which the culture described by Davies reflects the influence of particular religious traditions. This critical examination is extended to include the theological under-pinnings for the counter-cultural biases of Davies' characters. What is gained from this study is a picture of the relationship between a culture (including the internal protests against the culture) and that part of religious tradition which is either consciously or unconsciously dominant in the culture. It is the objective of this dissertation to paint this picture and, by so doing, demonstrate a process by which the context, revealed in the work of an artist, and theology inform each other.

The world of English Canada, about which Davies speaks in his novels, is one which bears the marks of the influence of Protestantism. In the dissertation the ways in which Davies, along with other Canadian writers, characterizes the culture in terms of the dominance of a Calvinist Christianity will be explored. More important, however, will be the delineation of the theological character of the resistance to the dominant culture. This shadow side of the culture portrayed by Davies in his novels can be imaged theologically as a modern gnostic rebellion against orthodoxy. The

theologian can observe in Davies' novels both the implicit
and explicit re-enactment of ancient gnostic themes in a
contemporary Canadian setting. The dialogue between context
and theology, then, occurs both at the level of the
relationship between the public face of English Canadian
culture and the theology of Reformed Christianity
and at the level of the relationship between the resistance
to the culture and a theological tradition of resistance to
orthodoxy.

The thesis of this dissertation reflects the author's
understanding of the relationship between Davies' novels and
theological concepts as an important example of the way in
which theology and context relate to one another. The
importance of this relationship will be demonstrated when the
reader discovers that an ancient religious tradition such as
gnosticism can provide the images and vocabulary for a
contemporary Canadian revolt against the dominant culture
and, that a story set in the present time and place of the
reader can raise questions which have the power to prompt
responses from a particular part of his or her theological
memory. The thesis of this dissertation can be stated in
this way: In the novels of Robertson Davies one can discern
a resistance to a culture perceived to be dominated by an
orthodox Protestantism. This resistance is seen in an
attraction to a contemporary gnostic spirit marked by an
interest in the individual (as opposed to the institution) as
the recipient of revealed knowledge, cosmological constructs

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(archetypes) as purveyors of truth regarding the human condition and the possibility of escape, through knowledge, from a negative human destiny. The identification of this resistance and attraction will be done under the rubric of the theologian's need to inform and be informed by the context of time and space in which he or she lives.

B. The Theologian's Task: Discovering the Context

i. Contextuality in Christian Theology

H. Richard Niebuhr, in The Meaning of Revelation, has argued that one of the most important questions facing theology in the twentieth century is that engendered by the existence of historical relativism. The stress placed on relativism in the scientific world of the twentieth century is, for Niebuhr, a manifestation of a much larger phenomenon which includes theology. Niebuhr states:

> No other influence has affected
> twentieth century thought more
> deeply than the discovery of
> spatial and temporal relativity.
> The understanding that the
> spatio-temporal point of view
> of an observer enters into his
> knowledge of reality, so that
> no universal knowledge of things
> as they are in themselves is
> possible, so that all knowledge
> is conditioned by the stand-
> point of the knower, plays the
> same role in our thinking that
> the idealistic discoveries of
> the seventeenth and eighteenth
> centuries and the evolutionary
> discovery of the nineteenth
> played in the thought of
> earlier generations.
> 2

This twentieth century sensitivity to the "spatio-temporal point of view" leads the theologian, along with other

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observers of the human condition, to be conscious of the particular time and place which are the content of the "standpoint" of the observer. If all knowledge is conditioned by this standpoint, then any articulation of what we know is incomplete without an articulation of the context in which the knowing takes place.

The theologian who affirms Niebuhr's assertion of the importance of the "spatio-temporal point of view" needs, as a part of his or her discipline, to posit a describable context. Theology, as the name of the discipline implies, has as its focus God. For the Christian theologian, the biblical witness directs this focus toward a God who is perceived to act and to speak. This same biblical witness also claims that the speech and action of God take place in the context of God's creation--the world. This is not to say that God's activity and speech are dependent upon the world. Christian theology will not admit to such a limitation on the divine. Speaking of the question which is engendered by the existence of the world and human experience in that world, Paul Tillich reminds us that "the existential question, namely, man himself in the conflicts of his existential situation, is not the source for the revelatory answer formulated by theology."[3] However, Tillich goes on to say, "It is equally wrong to derive the question implied in human existence from the revelatory answer."[4] In other words, neither the question nor the answer are derived from the other. And yet, an answer without a question ceases to be meaningful.

The revelatory answer of God is independent of the human question. It needs the question of human existence in order to truly be an answer. Tillich uses the term "correlation" to describe this interdependence of two independent factors. The concept of correlation drives the theologian to take seriously the place in time and space in which humanity finds itself. For, without any sense of self-understanding vis a vis the existential reality of our lives we are left with a revelatory answer and no human questions to which it might be addressed. God is perceived to be answering questions which haven't been asked—a meaningless situation! For one to speak meaningfully about God and God's revelation, then, one must take seriously the world in which men and women live. It is in the experience of finite creatures living in the midst of creation, that the question emerging from human estrangement is raised. With the raising of the question, God's answer enters into a dynamic relationship. It takes on a form which is accessible to the finite creature. Because the form of the answer is dependent upon the form of the question, the theologian who would speak about God must understand the existential situation from which the form arises:

> The material of the existential
> question is taken from the whole
> of human experience and its manifold
> ways of expression.....The choice
> of the material, as well as the
> formulation of the question, is
> the task of the systematic theologian..
> ...He must participate in man's
> finitude, which is also his own,
> and in its anxiety as though he

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> had never received the revelatory
> answer of 'eternity'."
>   5

The juxtaposition of finitude and eternity in Tillich's

statement indicates a concern for the moment in history in

which the questions and answers of theology are to be lived.

ii. Liberation theologies and contextuality

The recent emergence of liberation theologies adds a

dimension to Tillich's concern for the temporal pole in a

correlation-shaped theology. Liberation theologies, which

begin from the perspective of those who are oppressed in

history, are interested not just in the time in which people

live, but also in their place in relation to the rest of

humanity. One's nationality, class and sex become as

important to the dynamic of the relationship between

God and humanity as the time in human history in which the

divine-human relationship is articulated. For the liberation

theologians of our present era, the corporate nature of human

existence as manifested in nation, class, race or sex becomes

the focus for our understanding of the theological

implications of the promise of the Kingdom. The Roman

Catholic theologian, Gustavo Guttierez, maintains that the

Biblical notions of both creation and redemption are centered

in the liberation of the Hebrew people from bondage in Egypt:

> Creation... .is regarded in terms
> of the Exodus, a historical-salvific
> fact which structures the faith
> of Israel. And this fact is a
> political liberation through
> which Yahweh expresses his love
> for his people and the gift
> of total liberation is
> received.
>   6

For Guttierez and other liberation theologians, this Biblical image of a corporate liberation of an oppressed people is critically important. From their point of view, much of classical western theology has tended to neglect this image and, thereby, ignore the social dimension of the saving work of God in history. Guttierez states:

> Those who reduce the work of
> salvation are indeed those who
> limit it to the strictly
> "religious" sphere and are
> not aware of the universality
> of the process. It is those
> who think that the work of
> Christ touches the social
> order in which we live only
> indirectly or tangentially,
> and not in its roots and basic
> structure. [7]

The drive of liberation theology is toward an understanding of the human condition which sees the basic fact of estrangement not only in terms of a sense of personal alienation, but also in terms of alienation experienced in the social order. Liberation theology would demand that the language used to describe estrangement be not only individual but also political. "If we are to talk of revolution today our talk will be meaningless unless we effect some union between the macro-social and micro-social, and between 'inner reality' and 'outer reality'."[8] From liberation theology a new dimension is added to the conviction that human existence is important as the sphere in which the questions involving the relationship with the revelatory and liberating answer of God are shaped. It is not just individual human experience which is the focus. Human experience must include a

corporate dimension. Estrangement takes on concrete form in human experience in both the inner reality of the intensely personal dark night of the soul and in the outer reality of a world in which groups of people are crushed by the forces of classism, racism and sexism. Grace comes not only in the personal spiritual experience, but also in the act of political liberation. To ignore one dimension of reality for the sake of the other is to distort our understanding of what it means to be human and, thereby, to distort the questions to which the revelatory answer of God is addressed.

When considering the contribution of liberation theology to our discussion, it is important to note that this particular theological development does not represent a return to liberalism. There is a profound regard for the limitations of humanity in a theologian such as Guttierez:

> Without liberating historical
> events, there would be no
> growth of the Kingdom. But
> the process of liberation
> will not have conquered the
> very roots of oppression and
> the exploitation of man by
> man without the coming of the
> Kingdom, which is above all
> a gift.
> 9

The existence of the struggle for liberation is not identical with the Kingdom. It is, however, the sphere in which the promise of the Kingdom takes on human expression. God's promises and human praxis are linked inextricably. Jurgen Moltmann makes this point in Religion, Revolution and the Future:

> One cannot grasp freedom in
> faith without hearing

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> simultaneously the categorical
> imperative: One must serve
> through bodily, social and
> political obedience the
> liberation of suffering
> creation out of real
> affliction. If one
> grasps only the promise of
> freedom in faith and
> forgets the realistic
> demand for the liberation
> of this world, the gospel
> becomes the religious basis
> for the justification of
> society as it is and a
> mystification of the suffering
> reality.10

In Latin American liberation theology, the simultaneous nature of the relationship between the promise of freedom and the demand for liberation is crucial. Our drive toward liberation does not follow the promise of freedom found in the gospel. God's promises and human _praxis_ cannot be viewed sequentially. Jose Miguez Bonino argues that classical western theology has neglected this dialectic. Miguiez Bonino characterizes the dominant epistemology of western Christian orthodoxy in this manner:

> Truth is, therefore, pre-existent
> to and independent of its historical
> effectiveness. Its legitimacy
> has to be tested in relation
> to this abstract "heaven of
> truth", quite apart from its
> historicization.
>   11

There are two basic problems with this understanding of truth. First, it seems quite alien to a Biblical conception of truth. God comes to Israel not in the form of communication of a "heaven of truth", but rather in the midst of liberating acts in human history. "The faith of Israel is consistently portrayed, not as a _gnosis_, but as a

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way.....This way of conceiving truth finds an explicit confirmation in the Johannine emphasis on 'doing the truth'."[12]

Second, the epistemology reflected in Bonino's critique of western theology can be questioned from a phenomenological point of view. Are humans able to conceive anything apart from a given context of relations and actions? Bonino would argue that the human experience of knowing can never escape the historical realities of time and place in which we find ourselves. Thus, knowledge of the truth--knowledge of God--never precedes human praxis. Rather, our understanding of God and God's promises is discovered in the midst of our activity--our praxis. God's liberating word only makes sense in the context of concrete acts of liberation.

The refusal to maintain the viability of any kerygmatic truth apart from the events of human history raises the important question of verifiability. How can one be certain that God's promises are true, or that human actions are right, if there is no external measure unaffected by the relativity of human action in the world? Bonino admits honestly that there is, in his theology, no external truth against which one can judge the Christian's activity in the world. He argues, however, that there is a positive consequence of this lack:

> Within the historical mediation
> of our Christian obedience,
> i.e. the struggle for liberation
> in the terms that have been
> defined, there is an
> ideological projection (now

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> in a positive sense) which
> provides the terms for a
> significant criticism of
> our praxis. The
> social (collective)
> appropriation of the means
> of production, the
> suppression of a classist
> society, the de-alienation
> of work, the suppression of
> a slave consciousness, and
> the reinstallation of man
> as agent of his own history
> are the theoretical hypotheses
> on the basis of which
> revolutionary praxis is
> predicated. They become,
> therefore, intrinsic
> tests for such praxis.
> 13

In other words, in the encounter between the historically
conditioned Biblical struggle for liberation and the socio-
economic realities of the present struggle our understanding
of truth--our perception of God's will--is discerned.

iii. Contextuality in orthodox Protestantism

The stongly contextual dynamic in liberation theologies
may not be as distant from the kerygmatic emphasis found in
orthodox and neo-orthodox Protestantism as might be assumed
at first glance. In his article, "Who Tells the World's
Story", Douglas Hall argues that the orthodox suspicion of
apologetic theology should not be interpreted as a rejection
of the world's role in the dialogue in which theological
truth is discerned. Hall comments:

> ....my only observation would be
> that even if a strong dimension of
> mistrust against the apologetic
> tradition is present in Luther and
> others, it is not a rejection of
> the dialogical principle as such
> but of the specific conventions
> of the dialogue with the world
> developed by Thomas and other

> Schoolmen.......Only the most
> hardened forms of kerygmatic
> theology would want to deny
> altogether the theologian's
> need to learn from the world
> of which he is part.
>   14

The difference between liberation theology and the kerygmatic

theology of orthodox and neo-orthodox Protestantism on the

issues of the locus of revelation and external verification

of human perceptions of truth does not necessarily preclude

a common interest in context on the part of both theological

traditions. Karl Barth, for example, is able to hold

together his concern for the primacy of divine revelation in

Christian theology with a recognition that the Christian

message is also centered in a particular context:

> It [the Christian message] includes
> a statement about themselves [the
> Christian community], about the
> individual existence of these men
> in their own time and situation.
> And it is essential to it that this
> should be so. But it only includes
> it. For primarily it is a statement
> about God: that it is He who is
> with them as God.
>   15

The concern for context, then, is not restricted to the

correlational method of Tillich or to praxis-oriented

liberation theologies, but is, rather, an on-going need in

theological reflection which has received a particular

emphasis in those theologies.

C. The Dialogue Partner in Contextual Theology

This need for theology to be in dialogue with the world

if its utterances are to be meaningful has always been

present. The contemporary concern for an understanding of

context, found particularly in liberation theologies, is not,

in this sense, new. What is innovative is the demand that
the dialogue be much more self-conscious than it has been. A
part of our self-consciousness regarding the relationship
between theology and its context is a recognition of the fact
that every theologian, who would take his or her setting
seriously, needs to know where to look for expressions of the
ethos of the particular part of the world and the particular
part of history in which theology is being done. Douglas
Hall comments:

> The need for this dialogue
> always drives the Christian
> community to the doorsteps of
> particular representatives
> of the world--to persons,
> schools of thought, or
> movements in whom the world
> becomes most articulate about
> itself.
> 16

In other words, theology always needs secular dialogue
partners for its task. If we examine the history of
theological thought, we begin to discover such partners. The
theological system developed by Thomas Aquinas owes a great
deal to the re-introduction of Aristotelean logic into his
world. Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner acknowledge their debt
to existentialist thought in their discovery of the nature of
their world. Liberation theologians rely on Marxist analysis
to understand their social and political milieu.
Philosophers, sociologists, economists, anthropologists and
many others have provided theologians with indispensable data
through which the theologian is able to enter into dialogue
with the context.

i. Literature as a dialogue partner

The choice of dialogue partners is a subjective matter
in the sense that it is based on the theologian's intuitive
sense regarding which of the human disciplines has the best
grasp of the signs of the times. The subjectivity of the
choice is ameliorated somewhat by the fact that in a
particular age, some disciplines are more willing to assume
the task of seeking a comprehensive vision of the world than
others. For example, Nathan Scott argues that living in a
culture such as ours, in which there is no clearly
discernible core of accepted truths or values, it is
difficult for the philosopher or the sociologist to avoid the
temptation to deal simply with disconnected segments of
reality without regard for the need to find a centre of
meaning with regard to human experience:

> In such an age, when all is in
> doubt and when, as Yeats says,
> 'Things fall apart' and 'the
> center cannot hold'--in such
> an age, the philosopher may not
> be utterly crippled, if he is
> willing to have his vocation
> confined to the analysis of
> nothing more than the structure
> of sentences; and the social
> critic can always be kept busy
> in notating the tics and the
> spasms that are the signs of
> our distress.
> 17

Philosophy and the social sciences are able to survive an age
without a cohesive cultural vision of the meaning and purpose
of reality by turning to functional tasks. When this happens
these disciplines become·unhelpful for theology which,
because of its essentially teleological nature, requires a

radical concern for meaning and purpose (even if it takes the form of an existential longing for that which one does not believe exists) in its assessment of reality. Scott argues that, in a setting such as the one described above, it is the artists--particularly the writers--who have a much more difficult time settling for a purely functional vision of their task:

> But when the traditional premises
> regarding the radical significance
> of things have collapsed and when
> there is no longer any robust common
> faith to orient the imaginative
> faculties of men with respect
> to the ultimate mysteries of
> existence--when, in other words,
> the basic presuppositions of a
> culture have become just a
> yawning question mark, then the
> literary artist is thrust upon a
> most desolate frontier indeed.
> For, though he is sometimes
> spoken of as presiding over an
> act of communication this is
> a vulgar version of his role that
> could pass muster only in an age
> of television and of what is
> called 'the mass audience.'"
> 18

In an age without telos the writer may be seen as simply a communicator or entertainer in the same way that a philosopher or sociologist may be reduced to the role of an analyser. Scott's argument is that it is very difficult for the literary artist to maintain such a conception of his or her task because, by its very nature, literature drives toward images which are more than a mere collection of words shaped in a particular style. In The Critical Path Northrop Frye points out that a structural study of literary patterns leads one to an understanding of the way in which literature

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moves toward a sense of identity:

> Still less does the study of the
> recurring structural patterns of
> literature lead the reader to the
> conviction that literature is
> everywhere much alike. For such
> study, as just said, does not
> keep bringing the student back
> to similar points, but to the same
> point, to the sense of an identity
> which is the objective counterpart
> to his own identity. That variety
> and novelty can be found only at the
> place of identity is the theme of
> much of the most influential
> writing in our century...."
>   19

The structural patterns of literature lead the student, in

other words, not simply to an understanding of structure but,

more importantly, to an understanding of self. Flannery

O'Connor states that the writer is driven by the nature of

his or her craft beyond the mere arrangement of words to the

creation of a "believable world":

> Nevertheless, the novelist always
> has to create a world and a believable
> one. The virtues of art, like the
> virtues of faith, are such that
> they reach beyond the limitations
> of the intellect, beyond any mere
> theory that a writer may entertain.
>   20

If we accept O'Connor's notion that literature suggests a

"believable world" which transcends human intellect and if

Scott is correct when he suggests that literature, more than

other forms of human expression, finds it difficult to

abandon this task even when the the culture is indifferent to

the idea of "ultimate reality", then it could be argued that

literature might prove to be one of the most appropriate

dialogue partners for theology in our time and place.

The appropriateness of literature as a dialogue partner

for theology lies, then, in the observation that, like

Christian theology, literature describes particular time and

space and, yet, is not confined to that time and space. The

same dialogical relationship between immanence and

transcendence which is the essence of theology exists in the

human experience of story-telling. This correspondence

between literature and theology is reflected in the following

statement of Amos Wilder:

> If one is thus led to speak
> technically of the "phenomenology
> of story," must one not say that
> it is inseparably related to our
> sense of time and orientation
> in time? The more acute our
> awareness of time and change
> and of what Eliade calls "the
> terror of history", the more
> we are impelled to locate
> ourselves in the flood of
> succession, to grasp at ante-
> cedents and establish connections
> with what has gone before. [21]

The connectedness between present reality and that which

transcends it is integral to both theology and literature.

The importance of this connection to the Christian community

is reflected in the central place accorded story-telling in

scripture and tradition. From the creation stories in

Genesis to the parables of Jesus, the story has been used to

illume the human situation in which the divine Word is made

manifest. In western religious tradition the story is that

mode of human communication which is used more widely--

whether through re-telling the biblical story in words,

drawing the story in art or singing the story in hymns--than

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any other in the attempt to express human and divine truth.

Psychologically, the act of story-telling in the faith community brings with it an element of _katharsis_ which Nathan Scott describes as the "profound relief that is to be had when we succeed in simply contemplating the intractable givenness of reality, as it transcends all our scientific, philosophic propositions about it and our efforts at poetic evocation of it making its majesty known through what Hegel called the 'concrete universal'"[22] Amos Wilder makes a similar point regarding the relationship between story and human existence when he speaks of the capacity of the story to "light up our own adventure":

> The storyteller does more than
> organize his tale and plot. His
> fable responds to and organizes
> an inchoate fund of longings,
> anguish, obscurities, dreams.
> His narrations orchestrate, as
> by so many rehearsals and trial-
> runs, our most urgent impasses
> and gropings. The story "holds"
> us because it lights up our own
> adventure. Fictions do not
> take us out of time and the
> world. Their sequences and
> vicissitudes are woven of the
> same contingencies, surprises
> and reversals which attend our
> own uncertainties.[23]

It is this sense of _katharsis_ which makes the story telling found in the scriptures such a powerful medium. When Jesus tells the story of the prodigal son[24], for example, it evokes in the listener not simply an analogical description of the relationship between God and humanity, but also a profound insight into the often painfully jealous feelings of one brother toward another which can have the

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power to expose parallel feelings in the life of the listener. In other words, the story has the power to bear within it elements of both the human question and the divine response. In this sense story, whether from a religious or a secular source, is a potent ally when the theologian sees, as a part of his or her task, the exploration of the human context in which God acts and speaks.

11. The particular story as dialogue partner: the novels of Robertson Davies

In order to understand the manner in which literature works as a dialogue partner for theology, a particular literary corpus has been selected as the focus for this dissertation. Just as the selection of theology's dialogue partners has an element of subjectivity involved, so also does the choosing of a particular representative of that dialogue partner involve questions of the theologian's intuitive biases regarding the appropriateness of one literary expression over another. The subjective nature of the selection does not preclude, however, the provision of some rationale for the choice.

a. Davies' interest in the context: English Canada

The novels of Robertson Davies have been selected for this work both because they are of interest to the writer and because the goal of the theologian to articulate the dialogue between a given context and Christian faith and tradition finds conscious expression in Davies' art. Davies views as important both the cultural milieu in which his characters

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act out their roles and the spiritual dynamics which
transcend the particular time and place of his drama. In an
address to the Association for Canadian Studies in the United
States in 1977, Davies spoke of his interest in his own
heritage and in the world of myth which transcends and
informs that heritage:

> Well, to begin with, I am Canadian
> by birth, and, on my mother's side,
> by long descent. I have lived by
> far the greater part of my life in
> Canada, and I have some factual
> knowledge of it that I have gained
> first as a journalist and latterly
> as a university teacher; I have
> also another knowledge of Canada
> that I can only call a feeling in
> my bones, a congeries of intuitions
> and hunches belonging to my calling
> as an author. I am neither a
> politician nor an economist, and
> I cannot speak with any of the
> splendid authority that belongs to
> such people. But I am a Canadian
> right enough: I share all the
> Canadian perplexities and doubts:
> I approach them, however, with one
> eye cocked toward the concept of
> myth, which has been my study for
> many years, and the other eye clear,
> I hope, of that cataract growth
> of unwarrantable pride which is
> such a hindrance in any sort of
> national self-inspection.
>   25

Davies' critics have observed that the picture of
contemporary English Canada found in the novels does reflect
a desire, on Davies' part, to view his time and place
seriously without succumbing to the "unwarrantable pride"
which he fears. Hallvard Dahlie comments:

> In a sense, Davies stands mid-way
> between the serious celebrators
> of Canadianism and those who deny
> it altogether, and he has the best
> of two worlds, as it were. He

> can proceed with his accurate
> shooting of sitting Canadian
> ducks, but one senses that he
> doesn't really want to destroy
> them.
>   26

For Davies, the particularities of English Canadian culture

provide metaphors which enable him to explore universal

themes. In his own interpretation of his work, Davies speaks

of the characters of his novels in relation to facets of what

he envisions as the Canadian personality. Referring to the

major protagonists of the Deptford trilogy, Davies comments:

> .....all the three principal
> characters are Canadians, one
> of whom has been shaped by
> Canada's unquestioned virtues,
> but also by its want of spiritual
> self-recognition; the second,
> exposed to the same virtues,
> yields to Canada's allurements
> of glossy success; the third
> feels the lash of Canada's
> cruelty, which is the shadow
> side of its virtues, and arises
> from Canada's lack of self-
> knowledge. Neither the virtues
> nor the shadows are solely
> Canadian; they are universal,
> but in Canada they bear the
> authentic Made in Canada mark.
>   27

Davies' evocation of a particular vision of English Canada

provides the theologian a description of context. Davies'

interest in myth gives the theologian a sense of one

religious possibility which emerges from that context.

   b. Davies' interest in myth

   In an address to Glendon College in York University,

Robertson Davies described the world of his experience and

the world which shapes his writing in these words: "It is a

tough world, and it only seems irrational or unreal to those

who have not grasped some hints of its remorseless,
irreversible, and often cruel logic. It is a world in which
God is not mocked, and in which a man reaps--only too
obviously--what he has sown."[28] This world which Davies
describes is portrayed in different forms throughout his
work. Universities, carnivals, dark caves and small towns
provide some of the settings for Davies' particular vision of
the world. Teachers, business tycoons, magicians and wise
women are but some of the characters who act out their roles
in this world. Through the colourful landscape of literary
scenes and characters created by Davies, a common thread of
what Davies calls the "conscience......the writer's struggle
toward self-knowledge and self-recognition"[29] emerges. In
order to explicate this thread, Davies makes extensive use of
a mythological universe which has the power of exposing the
ways in which the personality and activity of each of his
characters contribute to the "conscience" of his work.
Davies' commitment to myth as a primary vehicle of
understanding can be seen in his statement that "myth and
fairy-tales are nothing less than the distilled truth about
what we call 'real life'."[30] The myths which Davies employs
in his narrative are varied. However much of the
mythological material is drawn either directly or indirectly
from the traditions of western Christianity. In a broad
sense, Davies' use of myth from the Christian tradition can
be seen as consistent with Northrop Frye's claim that in
Biblical imagery and narrative there exists "an imaginative
framework--a mythological universe, as I call it--within

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which western literature had operated down to the eighteenth century and is to a large extent still operating."[31] However Davies' use of this mythological universe is unique. For Davies the post-biblical myths and theological reflection of Christendom are more dominant in his writing than those of the biblical narrative. As well, the spectrum of mythological material is not restrictive in the sense of excluding either pagan material or obscure Christian myths which might be unfamiliar to the average reader. Finally the myths used by Davies more often than not carry with them theological interpretation which runs counter to the interpretations offered by Christian orthodoxy. These distinctive characteristics of Davies' use of the mythological universe will become evident as we examine in greater detail the relationship between myth and the drive toward self-understanding which operates as the "writer's conscience" in the body of literature created by Davies.

The combination of Davies' use of English Canada as the context for his stories and the interest in myth revealed in his writing, provides a fascinating dialogue partner in the attempt to discern the relationship between context and theology in the contemporary Canadian scene.

II. THE MEETING PLACE FOR THEOLOGY

AND LITERATURE:

SYMBOLS AND MYTHS

II. The Meeting Place for Theology and Literature: Symbols and Myths

A. The Roles of Symbol and Myth

Robertson Davies' employment of a mythological universe in his writing provides the starting point for a dialogue between literature and theology. The symbols and myths found in Davies' work can be explored in relation to the concern for symbol and myth which is an integral part of the task of a theology which takes seriously the legacy of a story-telling tradition in which the inter-play between spiritual and temporal realms cannot be adequately expressed in rational discourse.

Both theology and literature recognize what Krumm calls "the inadequacy and the inevitability of language."[1] When we speak about God, we cannot say everything and, yet, we must say something. Similarly, when we speak of human experience our necessary use of language limits the scope of what we are able to say. Language is a visible manifestation of the limits of human mortality. John Crossan recognizes the way in which our language expresses human limits when he says, "This is the limit of language, that is, _the limit which is language itself_. Our intentions, our theories, our visions are always confined within both language and story."[2] Frye speaks of humanity dwelling in two worlds. Each world requires a different language. "For the objective world he [humanity] develops a logical language of fact, reason, description and verification; for the potentially created world he develops a mythical language of hope, desire,

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belief, anxiety, polemic, fantasy and construction."[3] It is

this latter "potentially created world" which is the

principle concern of both theology and literature, for it is

in this world that the possibility of _telos_ and transcendence

dwell. It is in this world that our limited language is

shaped into symbols and myths which possess the possibility

of identifying, in a more profound way than would be possible

in the arena of objective language, the identity of the world

out of which language emerges. It is in this world that our

limited language is shaped into symbols and myths which

possess the possibility of finding in concrete reality,

images of transcendence.

For both theology and literature, the language creations

of symbol and myth are crucial components in self-

understanding. Just as a writer like Robertson Davies re-

tells myths in the journeys of his characters toward self-

understanding so, also, does theology make use of the

stories of the tradition when it wishes to speak of human

questions and divine answers. Rollo May states that symbols

"are the language of this capacity for self-consciousness,

the ability to question which arises out of and is made

necessary by the distinction of subject and object."[4] May

argues that the symbols which contribute to self-

understanding arise from three different levels of human

experience:

> For the individual _experiences himself_
> _as a self_ in terms of symbols
> which arise from three levels at once;
> those from archaic and archetypal
> depths within himself, symbols

>arising from the personal events
of his psychological and
biological experience and the
general symbols and values
which obtain in his culture.[5]

We can readily see these three levels in the symbols which form an important part of theological discourse. The Christian symbol of the cross, for example, is evocative of the sense of estrangement experienced in the personal life of Jesus. The physical pain involved in the symbol touches the biological experience of pain which is a part of creaturely existence. The fact that the cross is a form of public execution gives a public and political dimension to the symbol. A symbol such as the cross has the power to open the awareness of the individual or community to the human experience evoked by the symbol at one or more of these levels. In his research, May has discovered that in western culture the availability of symbols which have the power to grasp us and to point to human reality at one of these levels is in decline. "A second observation impressed upon us by our psychoanalytic work is that contemporary man suffers from the deterioration and breakdown of the central symbols in modern Western culture."[6] When this happens, May claims, there is an attempt to fill the void with "tools" designed to help the individual exercise power over nature. "Tools" are distinct from symbols in the sense that they arise out of the individual's perception of him- or herself as an object. The subjective element of human experience is lost. "The person may establish some power over nature (say, power over his own body, which our patients often desperately seek); but he does

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so at the price of separating himself ever more fully from nature, including his own body."[7] This psychological insight is consistent with the theological notion that genuine self-understanding is dependent upon an appreciation of the fact the we are at one and the same time both object--created by and addressed by God--and subject--the one who asks the question raised by existence. Symbols and symbolic language maintain the tension between these two parts of our being.

Like symbols and symbolic language, myths drive toward a self-understanding which respects our being as both subject and object. Scientific language has, as its goal, the description of what objectively is. The language of myth, on the other hand, revolves around the subjective human questions raised by the existence of what is. In Spiritus Mundi, Northrop Frye speaks about myth in this way: "For mythology is not primarily an attempt to picture reality: it is not a primitive form of science or philosophy, however crude. It is, rather, an attempt to articulate what is of greatest human concern to the society that produces it."[8] Myth and mythical language, like symbol, lead us toward a concept of self-understanding which includes both the given objective nature of our being and the vision and imagination contained within the subjective questions regarding the given realities of our existence.

Symbol and myth are crucial in the realm of theology. They are crucial for literature as well. Theology uses symbol and myth in order to talk about a divine-human

relationship whose subjective nature cannot be adequately expressed in objective language. Literature differs from theology in that it does not necessarily want to talk about the relationship between God and humanity. It is similar, however, in the sense that symbol, myth and the corresponding concern for a vision of reality which is both objective and subjective are essential to literature if it is to be distinguished from other forms of human language. "Mythology is a form of imaginative thinking, and its direct descendent in culture is literature, more particularly fiction, works of literature that tell stories."[9] The common concern for symbol and myth as the vehicles through which human self-identity is explored gives further weight to the appropriateness of literature as a dialogue partner for theology.

B. The Use of Myth in Robertson Davies' Novels

The fact that myth is an important dynamic in Davies' work can be seen by a brief survey of the ways in which myth is used and of the variety of mythological expression. In an article entitled "Myth Criticism: Limitations and Possibilities", E. W. Herd describes five basic literary situations in which myth criticism can be used:

> First, there is the work which
> avowedly sets out to retell an
> acknowledged myth.....Secondly,
> there are works in which the author
> uses myth as a means of literary
> allusion, intended to attract the
> attention of the reader and to add
> significance to a theme or situation
> by means of illustration or
> parallel....More interesting to
> the critic than either of these

uses of myth is its conscious use
as a structural element. This use
may be avowed or tacit.
                                        10
The other two literary situations which Herd describes--the

unconscious use of myth by an author and the attempt of an

author to create new myth (if this is, indeed, possible)--are

not as relevant to our discussion as are his first three

categories. An examination of Davies' novels reveals that

myth is used in all three ways described by Herd.

In Davies' work, the first two uses of myth are closely

allied. There is a sense in which Davies wants not only to

retell acknowledged myths but to do so in such a way that the

reader is challenged to make the connection between the

ancient myth and the contemporary story in a very conscious

manner. Anthony Dawson comments: "Davies' texts (like those

of Fowles and others) are highly self-conscious and clever,

alert to their own allusiveness and somewhat coy in their
                                     11
relation to their readers."   Davies' particular style,

therefore, tends to blur the line between the re-telling of

old myth and the use of that myth as literary allusion. For

example, in <u>Fifth</u> <u>Business</u>, the narrator of the tale,

Dunstable Ramsay, following his recovery from a war wound

which has almost taken his life, changes his name to Dunstan.

In order to make the significance of the name change clear to

the reader Dunstan's nurse and lover lets us know that "St.

Dunstan was a marvellous person and very much like you--mad

about learning, terribly stiff and stern and scowly, and an
                                                   12
absolute wizard at withstanding temptation."   The literary

allusion is made obviou... However, there is also a sense in

which the story of St. Dunstan is retold in Ramsay's life. The Devil who comes to tempt the saint in the form of a woman comes in Ramsay's life in the person of Liesl. Just as St. Dunstan twists the nose of the Devil-woman so also does Ramsay conclude a brawl with Liesl by seizing her nose and twisting it.[13]

The use of myth as both literary allusion and as a vehicle for re-telling story abound in Davies' work. The myth of re-birth and the assumption of new names can be seen in the above mentioned re-birth of Ramsay in Fifth Business, the transformation of Pearl Vambrance into the newly confident Veronica in A Leaven of Malice and Paul Dempster's emergence through several name changes into the persona of the magician, Magnus Eisengrim, in World of Wonders.

As Herd argues, however, it is the use of myth as a structural element in the story which is most interesting to the critic. We can observe the "re-birth" myth most clearly re-created structurally in the story of David Staunton in The Manticore. In this story Liesl, the same Devil-woman first discovered in Fifth Business takes David, the emotionally repressed lawyer from Toronto, into a dark and narrow cave in the mountains of Switzerland. Recalling Dawson's comment regarding the highly self-conscious nature of Davies' connections between old and new stories, the reader is not surprised that the entry into the womb-like caves takes place on Christmas Eve. The narrow part of the cave eventually opens into a chapel-like room in which, according to Liesl,

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the ancients worshipped bears. Growing increasingly anxious
to escape from the dark and damp cave, David begins the
journey back. At a climactic moment he becomes so frightened
that he is unable to move and in his terror, he defecates.
He turns to Liesl and says, "'I can't, Liesl. I'm done.'"
Liesl replies, "'You must.'" "'How?' 'What gives strength?
Have you no God? No, I suppose not. Your kind have neither
God nor Devil. Have you no ancestors?'"[14] In his moment of
desperation, David recalls a forebearer--a British barmaid
who bore a child without knowing the identity of the father.
With this link to the past David emerges from the cave.
In this particular narrative the "re-birth" story is told not
only using the phases of physical birth as the framework for
David's adventure but also employing the images--descent into
hell, the presence of the unmarried mother, becoming child-
like (in David's case, through the loss of bowel control),
the emergence into bright light--of transformation (i.e.
incarnation, resurrection or conversion) in Christian
mythology. Thus Davies takes the myth of re-birth and
retells it through the story of St. Dunstan's tweaking of the
Devil-woman's nose. He employs the myth to show the
relationship of the character of Dunstan Ramsay to St.
Dunstan through literary allusion and he uses the myth as the
structural basis through which his characters make their
journey toward self-discovery.

Along with the "re-birth" myth, there are, in Davies'
writing, other myths which recur often enough to be
considered representative of dominant themes in the author's

understanding of what is essential in the longing for self-understanding. The Devil, for example, makes frequent appearances in Davies' novels. Davies' understanding of the Devil will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter VI. In brief, however, one can say that Davies never views the Devil as the personification of an evil force disconnected from the forces of good in the world. There is always a dynamic connection between the Devil and God. In World of Wonders Liesl says to Ramsay:

> God wants to intervene in the
> world, and how is he to do it
> except through man? I think the
> Devil is in the same predicament.
> It would be queer, wouldn't it, if
> the Devil had only made use of
> Magnus that one time? And God,
> too: yes, certainly God as
> well. It's the moment of
> decision--of will--when those
> Two nab us, and as they both
> speak so compellingly it's
> tricky work to know who's
> talking. Where there's a will
> there are always two ways.'"
> [15]

In psychological terms the Devil becomes synonymous with the shadow side of one's personality. In Fifth Business, Liesl advises Ramsay to look at the unlived side of his life in the form of shaking "hands with your devil."[16] Whether in relation to God or as a part of the human personality the Devil is, for Davies, a figure more to be understood and acknowledged as real than as a force to be avoided. From this example we are able to see that Davies makes use not only of the mythological images of western religious

tradition but also of particular theological and
psychological interpretations of the image.

The Devil is not alone in the pantheon of mythological
figures used by Davies. Saints, ancient and modern, figure
prominently in Fifth Business. In What's Bred in the Bone an
angel and a daimon help to tell the story. Simon Darcourt in
The Rebel Angels speaks of imitating Christ as a part of his
journey toward priesthood. "Crucifixion was not a modern
method of social betterment, but at least I could push for
psychological crucifixion, and I did, and hung on my cross
until it began to dawn on me that I was a social nuisance,
and not a bit like Christ..." [17] For Davies the use of angels
and daimons, the Devil and Christ, reflects a strong protest
against an a-mythical modernity. Simon Darcourt in
conversation with Maria Cornish in What's Bred in the Bone
expresses this attitude when he says:

> 'It's wonderful to talk to you,
> my dearest, because you think
> medievally. You have a
> personification or a symbol
> for everything. You don't
> talk about ethics: you talk
> about saints and their pro-
> tective spheres and their
> influences. You don't use
> lettuce-juice words like
> "extra-terrestial"; you talk
> frankly about Heaven and Hell.
> You don't blether about
> neuroses; you just say demons.' [18]

The mythological figures which frequent Davies' prose
represent a concretization of human reality which stands in
sharp contrast to a reliance on theoretical language as the
sole purveyor of truth.

As important as Davies' use of the stories and
characters from western religious tradition, is his use of
theological concepts from that same tradition. Theological
ideas shape his narrative. For example, an important step
along the way to self-understanding is the notion of fate.
In Leaven of Malice Cobler says to Bridgewater, "You think
life has trapped you, do you? Well, my friend, everybody is
trapped, more or less. The best thing you can hope for is to
understand your trap and make terms with it, tooth by
tooth.'"[19]   This notion of entrapment in a particular
circumstance in life is given theological expression by
Darcourt in The Rebel Angels when he says, "As Calvin said
that mankind was divided between the Elect, chosen to be
saved, and the Reprobate Remainder of mankind, so it
seemed to me to be with knowledge; there were those who were
born to it, and those who struggled to acquire it."[20]   The
notion that fate is one of the dimensions of human existence
which must be recognized in the quest to achieve self-
understanding recurs throughout Davies' writing in different
forms ranging from the practical testimony of the worldly
wise to statements which employ the language of
predestination theory. The manner in which these various
literary manifestations of Davies' interest in fate relate to
a theological understanding of the subject will be explored
in Chapter VII.

For Davies, then, myth--whether it be embodied in a
particular form such as the Devil or in a vision of a
particular facet of life such as fate--is a critical tool in

the desire to understand an individual life. Discussing The
Manticore, Peter Baltensperger comments on David Staunton's
search for self-understanding:

> The leap into spirituality requires
> more than wisdom and more than a
> Magus figure. It requires a flash
> of insight which is not of the
> mind but of the spirit itself,
> a mystical revelation of the
> essence of existence which cannot
> be forced because it transcends
> existence and is beyond immediate
> comprehension.
> [21]

The tool which, for Davies, opens a window on the "mystical
revelation of the essence of existence" is the mythological
universe from which one draws images and stories which enter
into a dynamic relationship with one's own lived images and
stories. The nature of the relationship between myth and
human experience is expressed succinctly by the Jungian
analyst, Dr. von Haller, in The Manticore when she reminds
David that "great myths are not invented stories but
objectivizations of images and situations that lie very deep
in the human spirit."[22]

C. The Core Symbol

When literature is selected as a dialogue partner for
theology, the first task facing the theologian is that of
finding a point of entry into the dialogue. The common
interest of literature and theology in symbol and myth seems
to provide an appropriate place to start. There are,
however, many symbols and myths from which to choose in any
body of literature. This is particulary true with regard to

Robertson Davies who makes such conscious use of a rich and varied mythological universe in his writing. What is needed is a central or core symbol which will provide a focus for the questions and answers which theology and literature present to one another.

i. Survival as a core symbol

In her important critical study, Survival, Margaret Atwood maintains that every culture has at the centre of its consciousness a core symbol.[23] Influenced by the history and geography of the community, such a symbol acts as a point of identity for the members of the culture and is, thereby, reflected in the literature of the culture. She argues, for example, that the core symbol for Britain is the "island". This symbol evokes images of self-sufficiency and community compactness--images which do, indeed, recur in the various artistic expressions of that culture. In the United States the core symbol is "frontier". This image which speaks of self-reliance and entrepreneurialism permeates the different artistic manifestations of American culture. Margaret Atwood chooses the word, "survival", in order to describe the core symbol for Canada. This symbol is appropriate for a nation which has never taken a definite step in the direction of either expansion beyond its boundaries or dramatic revolt against greater world powers. Rather, it has continued to exist under the shadow of powerful mother countries and a neighbouring giant. The geographical reality of Canada also serves to reinforce the validity of Atwood's core symbol. A sparsely populated land of great distances with a harsh and,

at times, life-threatening climate will value survival.

Atwood's thesis regarding the core symbol in Canadian culture is applied in her book to several works of Canadian literature. It is significant that Davies is not one of the authors she chooses in order to illustrate her point. Examining two dimensions of "survival" as a core symbol will help to illustrate the fact that Davies does not fit as well as other Canadian writers into a system built on the notion that survival is the central theme in the literature of the culture.

The facts of geography and nature play an important role in Atwood's description of the ethos of Canadian culture and literature:

> Not surprisingly in a country
> with such a high ratio of trees,
> lakes and rocks to people, images
> from Nature are almost everywhere.
> Added up, they depict a Nature
> that is often dead and unanswering
> or actively hostile to man; or,
> seen in its gentler spring and
> summer aspects, unreal. There is
> a sense in Canadian literature
> that the true and only season
> here is winter: the others are
> either preludes to it or mirages
> concealing it.[24]

The frequent references to nature and images of nature ranging from indifference to hostility are, for the most part, missing from Davies' writing. When the natural world does enter into his narrative, it tends to fit into the structure of the story as an aside and not as an image for, or as a contributing factor to, the dramatic centre of the lives of his characters. In this regard it is interesting to

contrast two prairie novels with Davies' account of an
English touring company's journey across that same prairie.
In Sinclair Ross' novel about a depression era minister and
his wife, As For Me and My House, the natural descriptions of
the narrator-wife evoke a sense of isolation and despair
which is central to the novel's theme:

> It's nearly midnight. Paul's
> gone, and I've put Philip to bed.
> There's a high, rocking wind that
> rattles the windows and creaks the
> walls. It's strong and steady like
> a great tide after the winter
> pouring north again, and I have
> a queer, helpless sense of being
> lost miles out in the middle of
> it, flattened against a little
> peak of rock.
>   25

In W. O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind, a young boy facing
the reality of death in his world wanders out, alone, onto
the prairie surrounding the small town in which he lives. As
in Ross' novel, the natural description is evocative of the
feelings of the young boy and, in turn, to the intent of an
author wanting to talk about the meaning of life and death:

> High above the prairie, platter-
> flat, the wind wings on, bereft
> and wild its lonely song. It ridges
> drifts and licks their ripples off;
> it smoothens crests, piles snow against
> the fences. The tinting green of
> Northern Lights slowly shades and
> fades against the prairie nights,
> dying here, imperceptibly reborn
> over there.
>   26

These descriptions can be contrasted with a brief reference
to the prairie culture in Davies' World of Wonders. The
English troupe of actors travelling across Canada is, by
Davies' account, "out of time" in the modern world. However,

its creations still possess power in the Canadian communities
it visits:

> It still had magic here in
> Canada, not because the people
> were unsophisticated (on the
> whole they were as acute as
> English audiences in the
> provinces) but because, in
> a way I cannot explain, it was
> speaking to a core of loneliness
> and deprivation in these Canadians
> of which they were only faintly
> aware. I think it was
> loneliness, not just for
> England, because so many of
> these people on the prairies
> were not of English origin,
> but for some faraway and
> long-lost Europe. The
> Canadians knew themselves
> to be strangers in their
> own land, without being
> at home anywhere else.
>   27

Davies' reference to loneliness in prairie culture differs

from the spirit of loneliness evoked in the writing of both

Ross and Mitchell. First, there does not exist the strong

connection between the landscape and the sense of isolation

found in the people. For Davies it is the remoteness from

another culture--that of Europe--which provides the metaphor

for prairie loneliness. Second, the description of prairie

culture in World of Wonders is seen from the vantage point of

a detached observer. The narrator, Magnus Eisengrim, while

born in Canada, demonstrates no emotional affinity with the

culture which he describes. "The Canadians" of his

description exist in the third person. In contrast, the

characters in As For Me and My House and Who Has Seen the

Wind are intimately involved with what surrounds them.

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In an article on Hugh MacLennan, Dorothy Farmiloe states
that "a unique Canadian myth must recognize the place the
rivers and the wilderness which surrounded the early
settlements have played in our development; Northrop Frye
wonders if any other national consciousness has had so large
an amount of the unknown, the unrealized, the humanly
undigested, built into it."[28]   This reference to nature is a
critical element of the "survival" myth posited by Atwood.
The lack of prominence of such reference in Davies' work
makes it difficult to apply such a core symbol to his work.

The second dimension of Atwood's core symbol is that of
the lack of heroism in the major characters of Canadian
literature. Atwood argues that, unlike American literature,
Canadian writing is not populated with aggressive,
entrepreneurial and successful individuals. Rather, she
says, "Canadian authors spend a disproportionate amount of
time making sure that their heroes die or fail."[29]   Atwood
comments that even the death of a character is usually
accidental and, thereby, lacking any heroic proportions.
The dominance of the survival motif in Canadian literature
means that "a character who does much more than survive
stands out almost as an anomaly, whereas in other literatures
(those in which European Princes are common, for instance)
his presence would be unremarkable."[30]

While much of Canadian literature may be populated by
"losers" for whom mere survival might be their greatest
achievement, the characters in Davies' fiction do not fit
into this pattern. Magnus Eisengrim becomes a world famous

magician; David Staunton, the successful lawyer, does emerge
from the psychological straight jacket in which he finds
himself; Monica Gall succeeds in her singing career; Francis
Cornish excells as an art critic and forger. Even Dunstan
Ramsay, who, on the surface, seems to have had a rather
pedestrian career as a history master, succeeds in the field
that really interests him--hagiography. Davies' characters
rarely fail and rarely die. When death does come--as in the
cases of Boy Staunton, John Parlabane and Urky McVarish -
there is usually a dramatic involvement of foul play.

Survival--in relation to an indifferent or, even,
hostile environment or in relation to a culture oriented
toward failure--is not a dominant concern in Robertson
Davies' world. Therefore, the core symbol described by
Atwood is not helpful in the quest for the central symbol or
myth which will have the power to provide an entry point into
Davies' world.

ii. The Calvinist heritage

a. North American puritanism

An alternative to the symbol embodied in the term
"survival" might be found not primarily in nature but rather
in the religious culture brought to North America by the
early settlers. The English-speaking immigrants who were
ultimately to predominate politically and culturally in that
part of the continent north of Mexico came to North America
bearing the marks of a post-Reformation culture. A
particular brand of Christianity arrived with the immigrants

and was to have a pivotal influence on the ethos which developed in the new land. In a capsule statement Paul Tillich identifies this legacy: "We have in America, which is mostly dependent on Calvinism and related outlooks, the moralistic and oppressive types of Protestantism which are the result of the complete victory of the philosophy of consciousness in modern Protestantism."[31] Tillich describes the essential ingredient of the Calvinist Protestantism about which he is speaking in this way:

> The history of industrial society,
> the end of which we are experiencing,
> represents the history of the victory
> of the philosophy of consciousness
> over the philosophy of the unconscious,
> irrational will. The symbolic name
> for the complete victory of the
> philosophy of consciousness is René
> Descartes; and the victory became
> complete, even in religion, at the
> moment when Protestant theology became
> the ally of the Cartesian emphasis
> on man as pure consciousness on the one
> hand, and a mechanical process called
> body on the other hand. In Lutheranism
> it was especially the cognitive side of
> man's consciousness which overwhelmed
> the early Luther's understanding of
> the irrational will. In Calvin it
> was the moral consciousness, the moral
> self-controlling center of consciousness
> that predominated.[32]

When this cultural Calvinism landed on North American soil it quickly became the dominant religious and societal chord in the newly emerging culture.

The Canadian philosopher, George Grant, also argues that Calvinist Protestantism became a dominant force on the North American continent with the arrival of European settlers:

> For us the primal was much different.
> It was the meeting of the alien and

44

> yet conquerable land with English-
> speaking Protestants. Since the
> crossing of the ocean we have been
> Europeans who were not Europeans.
> But the Europeanness which remained
> for us was of a special kind because
> Calvinist Protestantism was itself
> a break in Europe--a turning away
> from the Greeks in the name of what
> was found in the Bible.
> 33

Grant goes on to say that one of the effects of this "turning

away from the Greeks" was to move the emphasis in theology

from contemplative thought to "a prophetic and legal

expounding of a positively conceived revelation, the purpose

of which was to make its practical appeal to men."[34] A loss

of the contemplative dimension of the theological enterprise

resulted in the encouragement of a society in which activity

became more important than reflection. This, for Grant,

represents a cultural prerequisite for the creation of a

technological society--a society in which political and

economic decisions are based upon technical possibility

rather than upon value judgements. The moral consequence of

such a development, for Grant, is the creation of a society

in which those remnants of traditional moral codes which are

preserved are those which serve technological progress:

> "'Worldly asceticism' was to become ever
> more worldly and less ascetic in the
> gradual dissolving of the central
> Protestant vision. The control of
> the passions in Protestantism became
> more and more concentrated on the
> sexual, and on others which might
> be conducive to sloth, while the
> passions of greed and mastery were
> emancipated from traditional
> Christian restraints.
> 35

The notion that Calvinism is a critical element in the

understanding of Canadian culture has also found support in the reflections of literary critics. In The New Hero, Ronald Sutherland argues that Puritanism has been a dominant influence on the literature of both the United States and Canada. "In Canada, the Calvinistic doctrine also prevailed, both among Protestants--Scottish Presbyterianism being especially strong--and among Roman Catholics--Jansenism, or Rigorisme as it is sometimes called in French Canada, conditioning both Irish and French Catholicism."[36] Through a study of the literature of the two cultures, Sutherland concludes that there are parallel themes in both English Canadian and Quebec culture which emerge from the Calvinist-Jansenist heritage. The insignificant state of·humanity, predestination, the resignation to duty and sobriety--la resignation chretienne--as a sign of election, and the suspicion that idleness or personal pleasure seeking are signs of predestined damnation, are all themes which can be found in both literatures.

In his study, Sutherland also makes a clear distinction between the manner in which the Calvinist heritage has been lived out in the United States and in Canada. Sutherland argues that the American culture derived from its Calvinist heritage a strong emphasis on self-reliance and individualism. He points out that two streams of puritan tradition emerged in American culture. The first, represented by Benjamin Franklin, took the notion of industry, self-reliance and material success as a sign of God's grace and then:

> ....dropp[ed] God from the
> picture......Meanwhile [Jonathan]
> Edwards went to the opposite
> extreme, moving further and
> further away from the pragmatism
> · of the Pilgrim Fathers, tormenting
> himself with the impossible
> task of harmonizing dark Calvinism
> with enlightened rationalism,
> and inaugurating a tradition of
> highly disciplined intellectualism.
> 37

These two poles of the Calvinist heritage and the struggles

between them continue to dominate the American scene. As one

examines Sutherland's analysis of the legacy of Calvinism in

the United States, two important factors in the development

of that legacy emerge. The influence of the Enlightenment

with its highly developed rationalism and its disinterest in

the mysterious and subjective dimensions of western religious

tradition is apparent in the writings of the key American

thinkers of the eighteenth century such as Franklin and

Jefferson. As well, the drive toward political independence

encouraged a suspicion of all systems of authority including

those of the church. Thus, it is not surprising that a

stress on the self-reliant and individualistic dimension of

the Calvinist heritage would take precedence over an emphasis

on humility and duty.

In Canada the loyalist spirit took precedence over the

desire for independence during the turbulent political

struggles of the eighteenth century. The Canadian political

path lay in a very different direction from that of the

United States. Sutherland argues that the church in both

French and English Canada was able to exercise more

institutional authority than was possible south of the

border:

> Canadian churches, both Protestant
> and Catholic, were careful not to
> risk cutting their own throats by
> encouraging intellectual self-
> reliance. The stress, in fact,
> was evidently placed upon the
> human-insignificance-and-impotence
> part of the Puritan ideology,
> making man more than ever
> dependent upon the church institution
> as custodian of God's grace.
> 38

This dependence on the church institution is paralleled in

the political history of Canada by a willingness on the part

of Canadians to defer to political authority. In his book,

Deference to Authority: The Case of Canada, Edgar

Friedenberg contrasts Canadian and American attitudes to

government:

> The Government of Canada comes
> to resemble the good, Victorian
> mother to whom it is impossible to
> attribute the sort of conduct
> that is necessary even to account
> for one's own birth. Conversely,
> there is a strong tendency to
> feel that whatever is really vital
> about oneself and realistic about
> one's response to others and to
> social situations is wrong,
> punishable, and, at worst, ego-
> alien. Realism, especially
> political realism, comes to seem
> un-Canadian.
> 39

The political caution and the willingness of people to accept

more readily than their neighbours to the south the authority

of church and governmental institutions has led, as

Sutherland points out, to an emphasis in the Canadian culture

on different aspects of the the Calvinist heritage than those

adopted by American culture. In a very general sense

48

Canadian culture has been guided by an interpretation of the
Calvinist heritage which stressed control and caution in
response to the human propensity to sin. As George Grant
comments in Lament for a Nation, "Nothing was more alien to
them [the Canadians] than the 'emancipation of the passions'
desired in American liberalism."[40]

b. Puritanism in Canadian literature

Sutherland's thesis regarding the impact of the
puritanism engendered by the dominance of the Calvinist-
Jansenist heritage in Canada can be demonstrated by reference
to several Canadian writers. For the most part the
puritanism of Canadian culture elicits a strong reaction from
those who describe it. The novelist, Margaret Laurence, for
example, has said:

> You just absorb it [puritanism]
> through the pores. I come
> from a people who feel guilty
> at the drop of a hat, who
> reproach themselves for the
> slightest thing, and for whom
> virtue arises from work; if
> you're not working twenty-
> six hours a day, you just
> aren't virtuous.[41]

Hugh MacLennan betrays his bias regarding Calvinism with the
following scathing comment: "Calvin, of course, was
dreadful, though the doctrine of the elect was sort of a
barbaric forerunner of Darwinism, I suppose. But I think I'm
at least over Calvinism."[42]   This attitude is reflected in
MacLennan's novels. In Each Man's Son Dr. MacKenzie says to
Dan Ainslie:

> 'Dan, you haven't forgotten a single
> word you've ever heard from the pulpit
> or from your own Presbyterian father.
> You may think you've rejected religion
> with your mind, but your personality
> has no more rejected it than dyed
> cloth rejects its original colour.'
> MacKenzie's voice became more sonorous
> with irony as he tried to remember
> Calvin: 'Man, having through Adam's
> fall lost communion with God. abideth
> evermore under His wrath and curse
> except such as He hath, out of his
> infinite loving-kindness and tender
> mercy, elected to eternal life through
> Jesus Christ--I'm a Christian, Dan,
> but Calvin wasn't one and neither
> was your father. It may sound
> ridiculous to say, in cold words,
> that you feel guilty merely because
> you are alive, but that's what you
> were taught to believe until you
> grew up.'
> 43

Finally, a poem entitled "The Minister" by R. S. Thomas

angrily lashes out at the puritan protestantism which has

exercised such a powerful hold on the consciousness of a

people:

> Protestantism--the adroit castration
> Of Art; the bitter negation
> Of song and dance and the heart's
>   innocent joy--
> You have blotched our flesh and left
>   us only the soul's
> Terrible impotence in a warm world.
> 44

The above illustrations are a small sample of the perception

of many Canadian writers regarding the strong influence of

puritanism on the consciousness of a culture. The emphasis

on guilt and impotence in the description of Calvinist

puritanism offered by writers such as Laurence and MacLennan

serves to emphasize the point that the Canadian version of

the religious heritage of North America is perceived to be

self-effacing in the literature of the nation. Ronald

Sutherland argues that the conditioning of the Canadian brand

of puritanism has lead to a victim mentality in the

protagonists of most pre-1970 Canadian literature:

> Because of the conditioning force
> of the peculiar Canadian Calvinist-
> Jansenist tradition, when a protagonist
> discovered that he was in disagreement
> with the dictates of the system,
> instead of defying it or fighting
> it as do American protagonists from
> Hester Prynne to McMurphy, the
> Canadian protagonist blamed himself.
> The tension thus used to become
> internalized, the character engaging
> in painful and destructive soul-
> searching in an attempt to discover
> his own deficiencies.
>   45

c. Puritanism in the writings of Robertson Davies

The theme of puritanism and its effect on its inheritors

is certainly present in the writings of Robertson Davies.

Davies' descriptions of the village of Deptford, the home

town of the major characters in his second trilogy, reflect a

society which values hard work and which is suspicious of the

more frivolous aspects of life:

> I have already said that while
> our village contained much of
> what humanity has to show, it
> did not contain everything, and
> one of the things it conspicuously
> lacked was an aesthetic sense;
> we were all too much the descendents
> of hard-bitten pioneers to wish
> for or encourage any such thing,
> and we gave hard names to qualities
> that, in a more sophisticated society,
> might have had value.
>   46

In World of Wonders Ramsay speaks of "the daily, bred-in-the-
                                    47
bone puritanism we lived in Deptford."   Like MacLennan,

Davies often focuses the puritanism of his culture on the issue of predestination and guilt. In _Fifth Business_, Ramsay recalls that, as a child, "I was alone with my guilt, and it tortured me. I was a Presbyterian child and I knew a good deal about damnation."[48] Davies is also similiar to MacLennan in the vehemence of his attack on the effect of a Calvinist culture on individuals. In _Fifth Business_, Liesl responds to Ramsay's statement, "'I wasn't brought up to blow a trumpet if I happened to do something for somebody,'" with this dramatic declaration:

> 'Upbringing, so? Calvinism? I am
> Swiss, Ramsay, and I know Calvinism
> as well as you do. It is a cruel way
> of life, even if you forget the
> religion and call it ethics or decent
> behaviour or something else that
> pushes God out of it......Oh, this
> Christianity. Even when people
> swear they don't believe in it,
> the fifteen hundred years of
> Christianity that has made our
> world is in their bones, and they
> want to show they can be Christians
> without Christ. Those are the
> worst; they have the cruelty of
> doctrine without the poetic
> grace of myth.[49]

While there are similarities between Davies' assumptions regarding the puritanism of his culture and those of other contemporary Canadian writers, there also exists a critical difference. This difference can be described in terms of the vantage point from which comment on the nature of Canadian culture occurs. While their roots are in the culture, Davies' characters are often found viewing the culture from a distance. The distance may be physical, as in the case of the Deptford trilogy in which the three major characters make

their greatest self-discoveries in Europe, or the distance

may be related to vocation. Dunstan Ramsay, for example,

views the Protestantism of his roots as one who has chosen to

become a hagiographer. The distance may also be

institutional. In <u>The Rebel Angels</u>, life is viewed from

within the walls of a highly urbane university community.

John Watt Lennox contrasts Margaret Laurence and Davies

in this regard in his article, "Manawaka and Deptford".

Lennox states:

> There is a way in which Laurence
> works out from her particular
> place and its times to touch
> what they, and we, represent
> universally. Davies works the
> other way--from the outside in--
> and the effect is quite different.
> Within this distinction, place and
> voice identify some of the
> differences between the Deptford
> and Manawaka worlds.
>   50

Lennox claims that while Davies has an alternate world

dedicated to "the extraordinary mysteries and people of older
                                                           51
cultures imbued with a thoroughgoing aesthetic sense"   from

which the rather pedestrian world of Canadian small town life

is viewed, Laurence's characters remain in one world and are

able to discover the extraordinary in life from within. The

effect of this difference can be seen in the way in which the

mythological world enters into the work of the respective

writers:

> Deptford's mythologies are
> ecclesiastical, psychological,
> theatrical and folkloric. The
> story of St. Dunstan and the
> Jungian process in <u>Fifth</u>
> <u>Business</u>, the structural

> use of Jungian archetypes
> in The Manticore, the
> legends of Sir John Tresize
> and Merlin in World of
> Wonders are the mythologies
> of Europe, the country of
> 'big spiritual adventures.'
> Manawaka's mythologies are
> those of Scots-Irish Canada--
> the small town, mercantile
> Calvinism and the Old
> Testament world associated
> with both.
>
> 52

With regard to the vocational distance which often

exists between a dominant culture, characterized by

puritanism, and Davies' characters John Harris comments:

> In the main, the heroes and
> heroines of Robertson Davies'
> novels, the characters through
> whom he chooses to tell his
> stories, are scholars. They
> are also pedants. They have
> many opinions, whereas scholars
> in the strict sense have only
> a few, closely related to their
> disciplines.....Furthermore,
> since the habit of forming
> opinions extends most easily
> into matters of human
> behavior (politics and
> propriety), Davies' opinionated
> scholars are inclined to
> priggishness. They editorialize
> extensively and gratuitously on
> hygiene, university budgets,
> women's lib, wisdom, contemporary
> music and a thousand other
> subjects.
>
> 53

This image of Davies' characters as pedants is consistent

with Davies' style of writing which Robert Cluett describes

as "a muted, Anglo-Tory style" with a syntax that is
54
"archaic, Romanesque, and formal".   In other words, both

Davies and his characters speak a language which is quite

removed from that of the small Canadian town from which they came.

This sense of distance between Davies and the culture of the country which is the birth place of his characters noted by his critics raises a question regarding the use of puritanism as the core symbol in relation to his work. While, like Laurence and MacLennan, Davies acknowledges that the effects of a culture informed by Calvinism are bred into the bones of the members of that culture, he allows his characters to create distance between themselves and the culture by entering into another world--a world quite different from that of their birth.

iii. The core symbol: the gnostic spirit

The distance which Davies creates between the places where "the big spiritual adventures" of his characters' lives occur and the places which manifest their cultural heritage cannot be explained as a simple reaction against the puritanism of that heritage. A broader conflict is involved. In an article in which Davies discusses his early reading career, he describes his attitude toward the Bible:

> About the religious approach of the
> Bible--because despite its immense
> variety, it has a prevailing
> attitude--there is something
> rebuking, and there are often
> times when I want something
> nearer to my own frailty than
> that.......But it is not easy
> to follow Jung and be a strictly
> Orthodox Christian; in much of
> Christianity there is a considerable
> measure of the spirit of the Little
> Red Hen, an indifference to the
> vagarious nature of the human soul.

> I determined, when composing
> this address, to be as honest
> with you as I could, and so I
> confess that there are times when
> I wonder whether polytheism
> has not a great deal to be said
> for it.
> 55

Davies' statement indicates something more than an uneasiness
with the Calvinist stream of Christian tradition. It
indicates a reaction against Christian orthodoxy in general.
In an interview Davies focused this reaction on the problem
of evil:

> Orthodox Christianity has always
> had for me the difficulty that
> it really won't come, in what
> is for me a satisfactory way,
> to grips with the problem of
> evil. It knows an enormous
> amount about evil, it discusses
> evil in fascinating terms, but
> evil is always the other thing:
> it is something which is apart
> from perfection, and man's duty
> is to strive for perfection.
> 56

Davies' assessment of the attitude toward evil in
orthodox Christianity can be questioned. The representatives
of orthodoxy are not uniform in their approach to the
subject. Significant differences exist between a theology
which places a strong emphasis on the possibility of moral
perfection in the light of the triumph of God over evil
(theologia gloriae) and a theology which takes the reality of
evil very seriously in its incarnational emphasis on God
entering into human suffering (theologia crucis). The
critique of Davies' simplistic analysis of Christian
orthodoxy on this subject will be put forward in greater
detail in Chapter VI. What is fascinating, at this point in

our discussion, however, is the fact that Davies chooses to center his uneasiness with orthodoxy on the issue of the nature of evil. His concern prompts, for the theologian, an interesting memory from the history of the early church.

One of the central issues for the gnostic movement--a movement which arose both within and outside Christianity-- was the problem of evil. The ascription of perfection to the Creator in Judeo-Christian orthodoxy and the notion that the creation itself was good were rejected by the gnostics. The gnostics preferred to think in terms of a fallen and capricious creator--a demiurge--separated from an unknowable and perfect God by layers of worlds and Archons. This system resulted in an inversion of traditional Christian doctrine. For example, the Creator's declaration in Genesis that there are no other gods becomes an indication of the Creator's vanity and ignorance for the gnostics.

One must be cautious about drawing too close a parallel between what Davies is saying in his novels and the statements of gnostics in the early part of the Christian era. Davies, for example, gives no indication of adhering to the radically negative attitude toward the creation posited by the early gnostics. When one examines, however, the mythological universe created by the gnostic, definite connections between the myths which attract Davies and those of the gnostics do emerge. In World of Wonders, for example, Liesl speaks of "a sense of the unfathomable wonder of the invisible world that existed side by side with a hard recognition of the roughness and cruelty and day-to-day

demands of the tangible world."   The world which Liesl

describes is populated with angels and demons in much the

same way as the world of the gnostics consists of mythical

figures which fill the distance between the world and the

remote realm of the unknowable God.   This relationship

between the mythological figures found in gnostic writings

and those which populate the literature of Robertson Davies

will be examined in Chapter V.

There is another level on which a relationship between

early gnosticism and the writing of Robertson Davies can be

seen.   In his major work on gnosticism, Hans Jonas offers

this basic definition of the movement:

> The name 'Gnosticism' which has
> come to serve as a collective
> heading for a manifoldness of
> sectarian doctrines appearing
> within and around Christianity
> during its critical first centuries,
> is derived from gnosis, the
> Greek word for 'knowledge'. The
> emphasis on knowledge as the
> means for the attainment of
> salvation, or even as the form of
> salvation itself, and the claim
> to the possession of this
> knowledge in one's own articulate
> doctrine, are common features of
> the numerous sects in which the
> gnostic movement historically
> expressed itself.
> 58

By Davies' own admission, the quest for self-understanding

lies at the heart of his writing. The quest for self-

understanding, however, takes place in a particular way. It

does not take place in the context of the formal educational

structures of contemporary society. Davies comments on the

nature of formal education in A Mixture of Frailties:

> 'If formal education has any
> bearing on the arts at all, its
> purpose is to make critics, not
> artists. Its usual effect is to
> cage the spirit in other people's
> ideas--the ideas of poets and
> philosophers, which were once
> splendid insights into the
> nature of life, but which people
> who have no insights of their
> own have hardened into dogmas.
> [59]

Rather, for Davies, self-knowledge comes when the individual
is able to reflect on his or her experience with the aid of
wise men and women (in mythological terms, the Magus and the
Sybil) and the resources of a mythological universe.

There is a connection between Davies' epistemological
assumptions and those of the ancient gnostics. George Grant,
whose ideas about contemporary education bear a close
resemblance to those of Davies, has said, "In many liberal
minds widespread university education was seen as fulfilling
the role which had been played by revelation in the once
dominant Calvinist Protestantism."[60]   Just as Davies claims
that the individual's reflection on experience is a much more
effective route to self-understanding than that offered by
the liberal education systems described by Grant, so also did
the early gnostics see self-understanding achieved at an
individual level as opposed to a reliance on the
interpretation of revelation offered by the institutional
church. Elaine Pagels states: "How--or where--is one to
seek self-knowledge? Many gnostics share with psychotherapy
a second major premise: both agree--against orthodox
Christianity--that the pysche bears _within_ _itself_ the

potential for liberation or destruction."[61]   The comparison

between the epistemology of gnosticism and the educational

assumptions revealed in Davies' novels will be explored in

Chapter IV.

Elaine Pagels maintains that, following the decline of

the gnostic movement, "the concerns of gnostic Christians

survived only as a suppressed current, like a river driven

underground."[62]   This underground current of resistance to

orthodoxy surfaces from time to time. Carl Jung, for

example, found in the world of gnosticism symbols and myths

which contributed to his pyschological investigations:

> Jung's particular interest in
> Gnosticism fits into his larger
> attempt to understand why
> traditional religious symbolisms
> do not seem to meet the spiritual
> needs of moderns and yet patients
> continue to call up religious
> symbols and images to focus psychic
> growth and distress. Jung thinks
> that the Gnostics were able to
> bring forth symbols crucial to
> psychic growth because they were
> still in close touch with the
> instinctual dynamics of the
> unconscious.[63]

Davies, like Jung, has an interest in the "suppressed

current" of resistance to orthodoxy and the mythological

images which it can offer in the artist's quest for self-

understanding. It is the contention of this writer that it

is this "ill-defined, amorphous movement with

individualistic, mystical and syncretistic overtones"[64]

which is the core symbol offering the theologian a point of

entry into the work of Robertson Davies, the novelist.

A note of caution must be entered at this point. Twenty

centuries separate the gnostic movement and the world in

which Davies tells his stories. Pheme Perkins warns that one

must be wary of claiming a strong continuity between ancient

gnosticism and modern manifestations of the gnostic spirit.

Speaking of those who make this mistake he says:

> Passing over the limitations of
> ancient Gnosticism, they see it
> as a sponsor for all protest
> against the all too visible
> defects of the orthodox Christian
> synthesis. Reading Gnostic
> texts through the glasses of
> modern subjectivism and delight
> in 'creativity', they mistake a
> genuine oral mysticism and the
> free variation of its tradition
> as the celebration of individual
> inventiveness.
> 65

In the light of this statement regarding the distance between

the world and ancient gnosticism and the context out of which

Robertson Davies is writing, it will be important in this

study to stress that the similarities between Davies and the

gnostics are to be found in the spirit of gnosticism and its

challenge to orthodoxy. Discerning that spirit in the

literature of the gnostics and relating that spirit to the

picture of Canadian culture found in Davies' novels will be

the goal of this dissertation.

III.   THE PRESENT REALITY: THE GNOSTIC

UNDERSTANDING OF CREATION

AND ROBERTSON DAVIES'

INTERPRETATION OF CANADA

III. The Present Reality: The Gnostic Understanding of Creation and Robertson Davies' Interpretation of Canada

A. The Evil Creation

1. The contrast between orthodox and gnostic understandings of creation

In the previous chapter, one of the significant tension points between gnosticism and orthodoxy was seen to be their strongly divergent views regarding the nature of creation. The Judeo-Christian tradition is based upon a particular understanding of creation. The biblical tradition and orthodox interpretation of that tradition maintain two important concepts regarding the material world in which humanity lives out its temporal existence. The first is that the earth has been created by God and that the creation itself is good. In the first chapter of Genesis each stage of creation ends with the declaration: "And God saw that it was good [טוֹב]." At the conclusion of the creation process the whole of the created order is surveyed by God and, in order to emphasize the point, declared to be "very good" [טוֹב מְאֹד].[1]

The second concept held by Judeo-Christian tradition is that of "the fall". Through the willful disobedience of the human part of the creation, a gulf is created between God and the creation which becomes the source of evil in the world. It is the tension between the essential goodness of creation and the existence of evil promulgated by "the fall" which forms the basis of the Judeo-Christian understanding of the existential situation of humanity.

The result of these two assertions is what Tillich calls "the victory of the idea that the world is a divine creation over the belief in the resisting power of an eternal matter."[2] The Judeo-Christian understanding of creation "places an essentially positive valuation on existence."[3]

This positive valuation combined with the notion of the fall leads to the assumption that humankind is able to experience both relationship with the divine and estrangement from God in the same context of earthly existence. The responses to divine-human relationship and divine-human estrangement are acted out on the same stage of creation. Paul Tillich expresses this paradoxical human condition in creation when he states that "history is the sphere in which man determines himself in freedom. And history, at the same time, is the sphere in which man is determined by fate against his freedom."[4]

The most dramatic point of divergence between orthodox Christianity and the gnostic movement occurs over the conception of the world and, in particular, the role of good and evil in creation. Where orthodoxy would posit the goodness of creation, gnosticism reverses the concept and views the creation of matter and the world as a malignant process.

In contrast to the positive view of creation in Judeo-Christian orthodoxy, there existed in the ancient near east two alternative myths of creation. The first account is a radically dualistic one which found favour in oriental

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movements such as Zoroastrianism and Manichaeanism. Two co-
eternal powers of good and evil are posited. It is the evil
power which is responsible for creation. In western gnostic
movements--movements which shaped the gnostic rebellion
within Christianity--evil is perceived as having developed in
an evolutionary fashion. A series of emanations from the
divine result in the emergence of beings who, as the
emanations multiply, become increasingly distant from their
source. There is a resulting diminution of good the further
the process moves from the divine source.[5] The creation of
earth itself occurs when one of the descendants of the divine
source--the "demiurge"--becomes angered over his inability to
bridge the gulf between himself and the realm of the divine
and seeks to create his own version of that realm. Because
of the anger and jealousy of the demiurge, the creation is
flawed. Benjamin Walker states:

> In short, the demiurge, wishing
> to copy the endlessness of
> eternity, the limitlessness of
> infinity, and the changelessness
> of permanence, only succeeded in
> making a world of time and its
> larger and smaller divisions,
> space and its larger and lesser
> divisions, and flux, making for
> change and decay. Since his plan
> was the offspring of deficiency
> (elliepsis), his world is the
> world of kenoma or emptiness, as
> compared with the pleroma or
> fullness of the stauros and beyond.[6]

In the gnostic movements within Christianity this
understanding of the purpose of creation results in an
inversion of orthodox perceptions of the nature of the world.
The good intention of the creator becomes, in the gnostic

view, evil. As a result, the actions of those who inhabit the world receive from the gnostics an interpretation which is diametrically opposed to that offered by Christian orthodoxy. Perkins comments: "The Old Testament is rejected. All its heroes from Adam to the Baptist are mocked. They share the folly of the boastful archon who inspired the Old Testament."[7] Adam's rebellion, for example, becomes an act of resistance against the tyrannical intentions of the creator. The law given through Moses becomes a restrictive force intended to restrain human striving for divine light. Hans Jonas describes this reversal of the orthodox understanding of the scriptural story in these words:

> It is almost by exaggeration that
> the divinity of cosmic order is
> turned into the opposite of divine.
> Order and law is in the cosmos
> here but rigid and inimical order,
> tyrannical and evil law, devoid of
> meaning and goodness, alien to the
> purposes of man and to his inner
> essence, no object for his
> communication and affirmation....[8]

The distinction between orthodox Judeo-Christian teaching regarding the nature of the world and that of the gnostics is clear. Whereas orthodoxy holds to a myth of essential goodness in the creation itself, gnosticism views the intention behind creation as evil in nature.

ii. The corrupt body

This attitude toward the material world extends, for the gnostic, to the body. As a part of creation, the human body

shares creation's essential flaw--that of being the product

of a malevolent creator. As such the body, like the world

itself, is seen as a prison which prevents the inner self--

that part of humanity which carries a remnant of divine light

and the potential for re-connection with the divine--from

escaping evil and suffering. Elaine Pagels comments that

"the gnostic tended to mistrust the body, regarding it as the

saboteur that inevitably engaged him in suffering."[9] The

best that can be hoped by any human creature is that the

body, like the world itself, might be seen as alien to one's

true being. To perceive one's essential being as that of a

disembodied spirit was the goal of the gnostic:

> For the gnostics stood close to the
> Greek philosophic tradition (and, for
> that matter, to Hindu and Buddhist
> tradition) that regards the human
> spirit as residing 'in' a body--
> as if the actual person were some
> sort of disembodied being who uses
> the body as an instrument but does
> not identify with it.[10]

Gnostics find themselves turning away from the material world

and the body itself in order to discover true being in the

non-corporal.

This assertion that the body cannot be more than a shell

unrelated to the true person results, in Christian

gnosticism, in a rejection of the incarnational dimension of

the Christ event. As one who is claimed to be greater than

any of the other aeons and powers separating creation from

ultimate divinity, Christ's body cannot be seen to possess a

reality beyond that of an image without substance. The
Christian gnostics adhere to a docetic Christology which
culminates in the dramatic picture of the "real" Christ
laughing while the archons crucify a shadow.[11]

iii. The response: alienation

The relationship between the gnostic and the material
world is characterized by a sense of alienation. The
gnostics felt estranged from the world in which they must
live and from the bodies which restrain the spirit. The
image of the "sojourner" which appears in gnostic writings
reflects this strong sense of alienation. Hans Jonas argues
that the estrangement from the material world in gnosticism
often found a sympathetic ear in that period--the first two
centuries of the common era--in the ancient near east when
the political stagnation fostered by the Roman Empire and the
incursion of oriental religion into the west has fostered an
atmosphere in which the real world could not sustain a sense
of meaning and order.[12] In other words, the social and
political milieu encouraged the image of the world as a
hostile environment which could not possibly be the true home
of the human spirit. In The Forbidden Gospel Burns comments
that the understanding of alienation in gnosticism strikes a
familiar chord for modern readers. He says, "Alienation is a
key word in every analysis of our modern society.......The
ancient world, the world in which Christianity came upon the
scene, was seized with the same malaise."[13] While there may
be some similarity between the world of the first two
centuries of the common era and the twentieth century with

regard to a sense of malaise regarding the relationship
between humanity and its place of habitation, the quest for
solutions to the disease takes divergent courses. "Today the
cause of the disease is sought in political and economic
systems; two thousand years ago it was sought in the very
fabric of the universe."[14]

The gnostic understanding of the world is one which
holds interest for the modern scholar both in terms of its
similarity to modern perceptions of the world--particularly
with regard to the concept of alienation--and, in terms of
its dissimilarity to contemporary thought--particularly with
regard to its cosmological assumptions.

iv. The rebellious human spirit in gnosticism

In The Gnostic Dialogue Perkins states that within this
general interest in gnosticism there exist different
emphases:

> Contemporary discussions of
> Gnosticism typically come at
> it from two different angles.
> The biblical scholars and Church
> historians use the tools of
> philology and historical
> criticism to find the place
> of Gnosticism within the
> broader spectrum of ancient
> religion and church history.
> From quite a different point
> of view, philosophers,
> psychologists, and creative
> artists look at Gnosticism as
> a manifestation of rebellious
> human spirit. The former
> seek to understand how the
> later orthodox consensus
> emerged out of the poly-
> morphous collection of
> sectarian options that dominate
> the earliest Christian cen-
> turies. The latter see the

> Gnostic as the human spirit
> perennially able to manifest
> its own transcendence and
> freedom when all the
> traditional symbols of
> cosmic and psychic order
> break down.
> 15

The scholar, when concerned with the relationship between
gnosticism and the emerging "orthodox consensus", is
primarily interested in the points of divergence between the
essentially negative evaluation of the creation found in
gnostic thought and the assumption of the goodness of the
created order which was to dominate western religious
thought. When the scholar adopts Perkins' latter position--
an interest in gnosticism as "a manifestation of rebellious
human spirit"--the emphasis shifts from a theological
understanding of the creation of the world to a concentration
on the dynamic of human rebellion in the world. Whereas the
cosmological constructs underlying the gnostic and orthodox
theories regarding creation often appear distant and esoteric
to the children of modernity, the desire to rebel against or
escape from the world does touch upon contemporary parallels
in western culture. In The Gnostic Religion, Hans Jonas
argues that the ancient gnostic, who felt estranged from a
hostile universe, and the modern nihilist, who feels alone in
a universe which is indifferent, share a disregard for nature
and an inability to find significance in the present
moment.
                                                    16

When dealing with the nature of creation in a
dissertation which has as its goal a theological
understanding of the view of the world and its inhabitants

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found in one contemporary novelist, the gnostic understanding of place does not play the role of a touchstone with regard to its negative assumptions regarding the creation of the world. Rather, it becomes important when one looks at the ways in which human characters react to the place in which they find themselves. At this point the difference between orthodoxy--in which humanity is seen exercising its freedom in the form of a destructive rebellion against the essential goodness of creation--and gnosticism--in which humanity, at its best, resists the malevolence of creation through escape--is critical when assessing the theological understanding of the world and human behaviour implicit in the work of Robertson Davies.

The theologian, in an analysis of the writings of Robertson Davies, seeks to discover, through an examination of the ways in which his characters react to the world, the theological assumptions which inform the author's narrative. Do Davies' characters react to their world--the context in which they have been placed--by attempting to gain mastery over their environment (as in the myth of the Fall), by seeking a transformation of their reality (as in the myth of Redemption), or by trying to escape from a mundane realm which seems to imprison the individual (as in the gnostic myth of the trapped Alien)? In order to respond to this question, it is necessary to examine the world in which Davies' characters are formed and, then, to discover their response to that world.

B. The Vision of Canada in the Novels of Robertson Davies

To the Canadian reader, Davies' world is both exotic and common-place. His novels are set in familiar territory. All of his novels begin in twentieth century Ontario. With the exception of The Rebel Angels, this Ontario context is expressed more particularly in the culture of the small town. The dominant religious presence in the early lives of these small town Canadians is Protestant Christianity. In a nation which, until the mid-20th century, had been predominantly rural and which, in terms of political and economic interests, had experienced a hegemony of folk affiliated with Protestantism,[17] the contexts of Davies' novels can be seen to be well within the mainstream of anglophone Canadian culture.

Davies' characters, however, do not always remain in the small Protestant towns into which they were born. Indeed, most of the major protagonists of the novels move away. When they move, their destinations tend to be places which are not only physically distant from the village environment. There is a distinct cultural difference as well. Davies' characters move to settings quite foreign to the milieu of the Protestant Canadian town. The world of monasteries, theatrical companies and the Jung Institute is a place very different from village life in Ontario.

The prosaic world of the small town and the exotic world to which Davies' characters travel stand in relation to

each other in much the same manner as two seemingly opposite components of a human personality. In other words, one world can be seen as the shadow of the other. The movement of his characters from one setting to the other can be seen as a paradigm for the tension which exists in both the individual and the culture. In an interview with Peter Newman, Davies speaks of the Canadian nation in terms of the paradoxical nature of human personality. Davies describes the nation as "torn between a very northern, rather extraordinary mystical spirit which it fears and its desire to present itself to the world as a Scottish banker."[18]

The image of the "Scottish banker" is given expression in the public culture of the small Ontario towns such as Salterton and Deptford. The "mystical spirit", feared and, therefore, suppressed by the Scottish banker side of the Canadian persona, is discovered in those other worlds to which the major protagonists of Davies' writing are drawn. The worlds of the magicians, saints and artists are not held in esteem by the world of the Scottish banker and, yet, those reared in the public world of Canadian culture find in these other worlds the integration of the human personality which comes when one discovers and accepts the suppressed shadow.

Just as the gnostic notion of the world is viewed both in terms of the existence of a restrictive mundane realm and the reality of a divine light, obscured by the malevolent machinations of the evil creator, in which humanity can find release from its state of estrangement, so Davies' world can

be seen as composed of a public culture which, through its fear of the shadow side of its being, obscures that other reality which, when discovered by the individual, brings release from the blindness engendered by a one-dimensional vision of life.

The comparison between the gnostic vision of the world and the world as seen in Davies' novels is, at this point, limited. Davies does not betray any interest in the highly negative attitude toward the created order. The search for release from the restrictive culture of the small Protestant town and the corresponding discove.y of alternate worlds occurs within the mundane realm. For the gnostic, the alternative to a world which prevented one from reunion with the divine was not to be found in another manifestation of earthly existence. Rather, it lay in a non-corporeal progression, resulting from increasing gnosis, through the aeons toward the divine. If a comparison between Davies' world-view and that of the ancient gnostics is to be made, it will be at the level of the dynamic of release from a restrictive world found in these widely diverse bodies of literature.

This dynamic becomes clearer as we examine the relationship between the world which values the image of the "Scottish banker" and the world attuned to an "extraordinary mystical spirit". In the novels these worlds take on concrete form. The movement between them by Davies' characters is transformed from psychological theory into lived experience.

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i. The world of the Scottish banker

Addressing the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States in 1977, Roberston Davies spoke of Canada in terms of the myths which dominate its national psyche. He referred, first, to the "Myth of Innocence":

> There is, for instance, our Myth of
> Innocence or Moral Superiority; deep
> in our hearts we Canadians cherish
> a notion--you see that I do not call
> it an idea, because an idea may be
> carefully formulated, whereas a
> notion is an elusive thing that
> takes form from every mind that
> embraces it--we cherish a notion
> that we are a simple folk, nourished
> on the simpler truths of Christianity,
> in whom certain rough and untutored
> instincts of nobility assert them-
> selves. Now of course you [Americans]
> are rather in that line yourselves,
> so you will readily understand
> what I am talking about. But
> you will not understand it quite
> as a Canadian understands it,
> because of course such a Myth of
> Innocence is really a manifestation
> of pride, and it means Innocence in
> comparison with the flawed virtue
>
> of somebody else. And for us the
> somebody else is you.
> 19

This discussion of the "Myth of Innocence" ends with a reference to another myth which, for Davies, must be held in tension with the notion of innocence. This myth is based on a cultural intuition that there exists a significant difference between the "innocence" of the United States and that of Canada.

The world of English Canadian culture is, according to Davies, dependent for its identity on the notion that, despite outward appearances, "in some important respects our ways are not your [American] ways, nor are our thoughts your thoughts."[20] This assertion of the concomitant myths of innocence and difference in a culture set against a powerful neighbour echoes Ronald Sutherland's contention that "while Americans and Canadians had the Puritan ethos in common....there were significant divergences in emphases and interpretation."[21]

The image of the Scottish banker which Canada would present to the world differs from corresponding images in American culture. Davies, in his speech, uses a feminine counterpart to the "Scottish banker" in order to personify the historical roots of this sense of difference between the two cultures. He describes Canada as spinster daughter who dutifully remains home with mother while her self-willed sister rebels against parental authority. The adventuresome and independent sibling makes a spectacular success of herself, mother becomes more interested in continental friends than in her acquiescent daughter, and "the Good Daughter Who Stayed At Home" becomes "rather a bore".[22]

These two images--the Scottish banker and the Good Daughter--reflect a spirit of caution in the face of the independent spirit of the southern neighbour. In the context of Sutherland's analysis of the cultural backdrop of Canadian literature, they represent a form of puritanism which prefers to colour life "in greys rather than in black and white."[23]

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In contrast to the self-reliant individual fighting against
conformism in social systems portrayed by American novelists
such as Melville and Twain, the Scottish banker and the Good
Daughter are images of the typical pre-1970s characters of
Canadian fiction who, according to Sutherland, are "self-
effacing, struggling within [themselves] to find an
accommodation [with social and political systems] of some
sort".[24]

One myth leads to another. The myth of innocence--
supported by a rejection of the shadow side of human
existence--is shared by American and Canadian cultures. The
fact that this innocence is perceived differently in the
written expressions of the two cultures leads to a myth of
difference. When the basis for the difference between the
two cultures is identified in terms of contrasting attitudes
with regard to the possibility of individual freedom over
against the conformism of the social order, we are led to the
positing of a myth of freedom espoused by one culture and
held in suspicion by the other. This myth of freedom, which
we shall examine, is, in turn, based upon a notion of human
innocence.

a. The American myths of innocence and freedom

The American historian, Sidney Mead, suggests that one
of the basic facts of American history is that "Americans
never had time to spare."[25] In a society which has been
dominated by the notion of conquerable frontiers (from the
westward migration of pioneers to the present fascination

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with space exploration) time is consumed in the business of "taming" the wilderness and expanding into it.

What America has had in the development of its history, Mead argues, is space. For three centuries the existence of vast under-populated land provided Americans with the opportunity to move. If life in one locality became unbearable, movement to another place was always an option. Thus the concept of freedom in American thought has always been linked to space and movement.

This orientation toward seemingly limitless space in American history had an effect on the dominant theological assumptions which emerged in the culture. The earliest English speaking immigrants to the continent were predominantly Protestant. As we have seen, the particular brand of Protestantism which they brought to the new world was marked by the influence of Calvinism.

Two legacies from Europe--Calvinist puritanism and the rationalism of the Enlightenment--shaped the theological presuppositions of the American nation. These two poles of the American theological heritage are filtered through the hermeneutic of a nation committed to filling space. Thus, Mead is able to characterize American Protestants in the nineteenth century as theological pietists who "tended to endorse the moral and social ideals and attitudes of the emerging modern age."[26] The maturing nation still possessed the language of Reformation Christianity; however, the experience of rapid expansion in the nation had the effect of

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emphasizing the activist dimensions of reformed Christianity.
Revivalism, missions and voluntarism became the hallmarks of
Protestant Christianity in nineteenth century North America.
Those elements of the tradition which encouraged a
contemplative rather than active response were neglected.
This is particularly true with regard to the Reformation
understanding of the potential for sin in every human
activity and the tragedy implicit in every human attempt to
achieve mastery over either nature or history.   Douglas Hall
in Lighten Our Darkness describes this neglect of the
tradition:

> Wise men who knew well enough the
> traditions of Athens and Jerusalem,
> in their zeal for the new, liberating
> vision, neglected to criticize the
> image of man they championed. Their
> statements sound to us exaggerated,
> naively heroic. Yet we recognize in
> them the very stuff out of which
> this continent was made. Anyone
> over forty years of age in North
> America has heard without disbelief--
> often from pulpits:
>   I am the master of my fate;
>   I am the captain of my soul.
>   27

The optimism of the new land brought about by the
experience of wilderness conquests results in a diminution of
interest in the concept of human limitation found in the
biblical understanding of covenant.   In this evolution, what
remains and is strengthened is the sense that material wealth
and technological progress exist as signs of the chosen
status of the Protestant immigrants to the new world.   Dennis
Duffy describes the nature of this evolution of understanding
in relation to covenant:

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While the New England covenant had
been between God and His people,
the new one lay between the
imperial power and its subjects.
The descent from the sacred to
the secular in the figuration
of the parties to the contract
offers another instance of a
pattern of cultural discourse
central to the experience of
the Romantic era, but the old
feature of the reduction of the
natural enviroment to token
status abides. Material
development remains an implicit
good, a confirmation of fidelity
to the covenant, a progress with
no intrinsic limits and prohibitions.
[28]

As the "covenant" becomes secularized, it is not only

the ideas of human limitation and dependence upon God which

are lost, but also any notion of human inter-dependence

within a community. The North American's understanding of

self originates in the individualism of the post-feudal

western world. Reinhold Niebuhr sees the origin of this

individualism in the "illusions which seemed plausible enough

in the early stages of the bourgeois rebellion against

feudalism."[29] The new commercialism, which was a critical

factor in the rebellion, opened up new vocational

possibilities and made possible the accumulation of wealth

through individual enterprise. The individualism which

results reaches its zenith in the most entrepreneurial of the

western cultures--English North America. The "liberal idea

of a self-sufficient individual" combines with the "bourgeois

sense of individual mastery over historical destiny"[30] to

form the secular basis for a "covenant" which stresses the

material rewards implied in "chosenness" and which neglects

the burden of dependence upon either God or the community.

Carl Rashke, in The Interruption of Eternity,
indicates that the reality of conquerable frontier in the
American scene has led to an adoption of a type of realized
eschatology in the image of the 'new Adam':

> A paramount American myth has
> been that of the 'new Adam'
> arriving after all the hardships
> and tribulations of history
> in the new Eden that was the
> unspoiled wilderness sprawling
> from the Carolinas to the
> Rockies. And there in the
> garden the American Adam would
> be free to develop and express
> himself without restriction.
> [31]

Raschke, in an attempt to draw a connection between ancient
gnosticism and American attitudes toward the new world claims
that "the presumption of already existing in the true,
spiritual kingdom rather than awaiting it with faith and
humility has marked both the Gnostic and, in a certain
measure, the American world picture."[32]   For the gnostic, a
creation which is negative in its genesis is owed no
allegiance and can, thus, be neglected as one enters a new
kingdom through the acquisition of spiritual knowledge. For
the new American, the tragic dimension of human history--
symbolized by the Fall--can similarly be regarded as
unimportant since it is located in an old place--Europe--and
the new American is no longer there. It is unwise to draw
this comparison between the Gnostic and the new American too
far. As Raschke himself warns, "if the American stance can
be called 'Gnostic', it has been a vibrant, outgoing version
of Gnosticism. The classic Gnostic cowers before the flood

of historical life and rues the concept of progress."
While American mythology may uphold a notion of having
escaped the consequences of the Fall, this escape does not
involve a rejection of the natural world. Rather, the
natural world and its resources--the untamed wilderness--are
seen as allies in the attempt to find freedom from the tragic
consequences of history. In other words, there is a sharp
contrast between gnostic pessimism regarding the possibility
for redemption in the created order and American optimism
regarding the same issue.

This point of contrast between classical gnosticism and
the American ethos can also be drawn in terms of the
relationship between American mythology and Christian
orthodoxy. The same optimism which distinguishes the
theological perceptions of American society from those of the
gnostics, also marks a point of separation between the
anthropological assumptions of culture holding a myth of
freedom expressed in the primary symbols of space and
movement and the understanding of the nature of humankind
found in Protestant Christianity. Reinhold Niebuhr reminds
us that what emerged in the new world was a "modern
civilization" which "was ushered in on a wave of boundless
social optimism" and which rejected the Christian doctrine of
original sin. This has led to a distorted (in relation to
Christian orthodoxy) vision of human nature:

> The confidence of modern secular
> idealism in the possibility of an
> easy resolution of the tension
> between individual and community,

> or between classes, races and
> nations is derived from a too
> optimistic view of human nature.
> This too generous estimate of
> human virtue is intimately
> related to an erroneous estimate
> of the dimensions of the human
> stature. The conception of
> human nature which underlies
> the social and political
> attitudes of a liberal democratic
> culture is that of an essentially
> harmless individual.
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The American understanding of their context--that of a new world which, through the symbol of limitless space, gives humanity the opportunity to escape the tragic consequences of existence--differs from both gnostic and orthodox Christian conceptions of the world. The gnostic reaction to place is one of complete rejection. The world can only be viewed as a prison which prevents the human soul from achieving re-unification with the divine. The orthodox definition of place is found in the paradox between the essential goodness of creation and the reality of the Fall. Out of these differing perceptions of place emerge three distinct notions of freedom. For the gnostic freedom is found outside the present world while the orthodox Christian expects the release from bondage to come in the redemption of the world. The American myth of innocence is based on a new world in which human freedom has already been realized through the process of human movement and conquest.

immigrants were, for the most part, Protestant. Indeed, as

Dennis Duffy reminds us, these first settlers carried with

them not just a Protestant heritage but a Protestantism

interpreted through the American experience:

> The first anglophone social groups
> that were not congeries of mercantile
> or military transients came not from
> the imperial motherland, but from
> the counter-revolutionary remnants
> of a rebellious colony......The
> mythologies--that is, not the lies,
> but the symbolic pattern of
> meaning--that the United Empire
> Loyalists would construct became
> the spiritual backbone of Upper
> Canada, in time to become the
> most powerful and prosperous of
> the anglophone Canadian domains.[36]

The mythologies which the United Empire Loyalists brought

with them were those shaped by the combination of puritanism

and the Enlightenment filtered through a myth of freedom

based upon movement into new space. With this common

inheritance, any significant differences between the two

nations with regard to their perceptions of the world and

human behaviour would emerge as the nations matured. On the

one hand, the social dynamics and the ongoing interpretation

of the theological heritage seem to have developed in a

similar manner in both countries. The description of

nineteenth century Canadian Protestantism given by John Moir

would, for example, betray no difference between the

individualism and adherence to puritanical values of the

Canadian and that of the American experience:

> Without exception the Protestant
> churches in Canada believed
> fervently in the nineteenth

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> century ideals of individualism
> and self-help, and with their
> Roman Catholic brethren shared
> a puritanical approach to moral
> and social issues that has
> often been credited or blamed
> on the ever-present frontier.
>   37

George Grant argues that, in spite of a rhetorical commitment

to communal values on the part of the architects of the

Canadian confederation, the powerful pull of the culture to

the south combined with the fact that modernity had also

expressed itself in the British empire has resulted in an

interest in individualism and entrepreneurialism similar to

that which has developed in the United States:

> Indeed, when one reads the speeches
> of those founders whom we celebrated
> in 1967, one is aware of their
> continual suspicion of the foundations
> of the American republic, and of
> their desire to build a political
> society with a clearer and firmer
> doctrine of the common good than
> that at the heart of the liberal
> democracy to the south.....
> Nevertheless, having asserted these
> differences, what is far more important
> is to repeat that the English
> empire was a dominant source of
> modernity. The early Canadian
> settlers may have wanted to be
> different from the Americans
> in detail but not in any
> substantial way which questioned
> that modernity.
>   38

Grant's argument regarding the substantial similarity

between Canadian and American cultures found in their mutual

adherence to technological solutions to human problems is

persuasive. Yet, the perception of difference remains. A

unique Canadian identity continues to be named as a

possibility in forms beyond the empty rhetoric of

politicians. In his 1977 speech, Davies identified the literature of the nation as the primary realm in which the question of identity is kept alive:

> People who look deeper into
> our national predicament desire
> more durable evidences of
> identity. They seek it in
> the arts. Science is of no
> help because scientists, benign
> or malignant, refuse to play
> the national game. Music
> is a lost cause, because the time
> for national schools of music
> seems to have passed; music
> is of international worth or
> it is nothing, and some of
> our contemporary music has
> won gratifying acceptance in
> the larger musical world.
> Painting is a different matter,
> and certainly some of the
> painting done in Canada in the
> present century has strong
> national inspiration and
> individuality. But it is
> in poetry and fiction that the
> questers repose their greatest
> hopes. A Canadian literature,
> recognizable as such at home
> and abroad, is what they want.[39]

The desire for identity--a sense of distinction with regard to the powerful neighbour--remains in spite of the universalizing tendencies of the modern western world. While such a quest experiences frustration in the face of the congruency of social and economic goals in two nations committed to the same adherence to modernity, it finds greater acceptance in the literature of the nation. It is not surprising, for example, that from a Canadian point of view, "cultural industries" (particularly publishing) become the most sensitive battleground in free trade negotiations between the two nations.

The literature of the nation continues to manifest an identifying "myth of difference" in Canadian culture. When the literature is examined, it becomes apparent that the myth is based upon perceived differences in degree as opposed to differences in kind between the two cultures. For example, Dooley speaks of a greater sense of materialism in the southern culture as a sign of difference. Referring to Hugh MacLennan, in this regard, he says:

> In The Precipice he [Hugh MacLennan]
> shows how the legacy of Puritanism has
> produced a sense of guilt and fatalism
> in the twentieth century American; but
> the American has succumbed to materialism,
> and therefore is close to the edge of
> of a precipice. Paradoxically the
> Canadian, who has been delayed in his
> development and, therefore, retains
> even more of Puritanism, is less
> ready to succumb to contemporary
> materialism.
> 40

Dooley's comment reiterates the point that while the two cultures share a common legacy of cultural and theological influences, the formative experience of frontier and conquest in American experience changes the way in which the common tradition is interpreted. The devolution of covenant theology into an assumption about the primacy of material success as a sign of God's favour is felt more strongly in the United States because the hermeneutic of a prosperity arising from control of nature, through which theological concepts are filtered, has greater historical veracity than is the case with the northern culture which has been dominated by a sense of physical survival and an ambivalent

relationship with more powerful mother and sister nations.

c. The marks of the Scottish banker: subdued materialism, subdues individualism and subdued passions

Subdued materialism, as a mark of the difference between the cultures, takes shape in the lives of the major protagonists of Davies' Deptford trilogy. Dunstan Ramsay, David Staunton and Magnus Eisengrim have achieved a state of financial security in their lives. The means by which this security is achieved differ. Ramsay becomes affluent through prudent investment of his teacher's salary, David Staunton through a legal practice and Eisengrim as a result of his genius as a magician. What is significant, however, is that financial success in all cases remains a secondary interest in their lives. Hagiography, the law and magic are valued intrinsically rather than for any monetary rewards involved. When affluence is pursued as a primary goal, as in the case of Boy Staunton, it is accompanied by a resistance to the spiritual dimension of human existence and a resulting lack of self-knowledge.

A counterpoint to subdued materialism as a mark of difference between Canadian and American cultures is to be found in a sense of subdued individualism. Ronald Sutherland points to the issue of individualism as a traditional distinguishing feature between American and Canadian literature:

> Viewing the main bodies of American
> and Canadian literature side by side,
> then, the salient differentiating

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> feature is in the attitude of the
> protagonists. The American is
> defiant, hurling challenges not only
> at the system but sometimes even
> in the face of God. The pre-
> 1970s Canadian is self-effacing,
> struggling within himself to find
> an accommodation of some sort.
> This difference in attitudes is
> the result of the divergent
> devolutions of the Puritan ethos
> in each country, the glorification
> of individualism and self-reliance
> on the one side and trust in
> authority and systems on the other.[41]

The significant phrase in Sutherland's analysis is "pre-1970s

Canadian". His argument is based on the assumption that a

change in Canadian self-perception can be perceived in the

evolution of the national literature in the modern period.

Using Dunstan Ramsay as an example, he indicates that, in

modern Canadian novels, the need to accommodate oneself to

the social order or to suppress the shadow side of one's

being is broken. "Protagonist Dunstan Ramsay lives a

difficult life, but he does not submit to the smothering of

his human desire to seek deeper truths, and he finds within

himself the imaginative capacity to avoid drab survival or

self-destruction."[42]   An individualism, based on a refusal to

bind oneself within the confines of a society marked by a

rigid puritanism, does characterize Ramsay, as well as the

other major characters of Davies' novels. It is, however, an

individualism which is not marked by a spirit of "defiance"

or by "hurling challenges" at societal systems. Davies'

characters do not engage in an outward rejection of the

social order. When Liesl speaks to Ramsay regarding his

"unlived life," she trivializes the flaunting of social norms

as a response to his lack of self-understanding. "I don't

mean you should have secret drunken weeks and a widow in a

lacy flat who expects you every Thursday, like some suburban

ruffian." [43]   Rather, she suggests that Ramsay understand and

appreciate the role which he is already playing in the human

drama. The role is that of "fifth business"--the equivalent

of the baritone in an opera who ties together the lives of

the more major characters. Ramsay's awareness of himself--

his individualism--is found in the rea   tion of the role he

plays in relation to others rather than in a dramatic

rejection of the course of the drama itself. It is this type

of individualism--marked more by internal than

external change--which defines what Sutherland calls "the new

Canadian hero":

> there is a marked parallel between
> Fifth Business and current tendencies
> in Canada. We have already noted
> the blossoming spirit of national
> independence and self-esteem, signalled
> in literature by the emergence of
> the new Canadian hero. There is
> also abroad a new spirit of inquiry,
> a desire to probe and to know the
> darker aspects of the Canadian totality.[44]

The subdued individualism and subdued materialism of

Canadian culture find expression in Davies' image of the

Scottish banker. The banker is concerned with material

security. He differs from the entrepreneur with regard to

the level of caution associated with the concern. The

difference is also noted in the fact that the banker works

within an established financial system. The entrepreneur, on

the other hand, strives to be as independent as possible of

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institutions which would restrict enterprise. Mordecai
Richler reinforces this cultural stereotype of the American
entrepreneur contrasted with the Canadian banker when he
claims that "if the pre-World War I American boy, at the age
of sixteen, was dreaming of how to conquer and market the
rest of the globe, his Canadian equivalent, at the same time,
was already seeking a position with an unrivaled pension
scheme."[45]

The banker is an image intended to define a world
dominated by restraint and caution in the area of individual
enterprise. In his use of the image, Davies attaches a
nationality to the banker. The Scottishness of the banker
becomes, for Davies, an ethnic metaphor for the subdued
passions of the culture.

The fact that the banker of Davies' image is Scottish is
consistent with both the role accorded to this ethnic group
in Davies' writing and a sociological analysis of the role
played by folk of Scottish descent in the Canadian story. In
the social heirarchy of Davies' world, people of Scottish
descent are prominent. The ideas and social mores of this
national group are accorded an ascendant position in the
culture of small town English Canada. In Fifth Business,
Davies describes Deptford, the "home town" of his second
trilogy, in this way:

> Our household, then, was representative
> of the better sort of life in the village,
> and we thought well of ourselves. Some
> of this good opinion arose from being
> Scots; my father had come from Dumfries
> as a young man, but my mother's family

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> had been three generations in Canada
> without having become a whit less Scots
> than when her grandparents left
> Inverness. The Scots, I believed until
> I was aged at least twenty-five, were
> the salt of the earth, for although
> this was never said in our household
> it was one of those accepted truths
> which do not need to be laboured. By
> far the majority of the Deptford
> people had come to Western Ontario
> from the south of England, so we were
> not surprised that they looked to us,
> the Ramsays, for common sense, prudence,
> and right opinions on virtually
> everything.[46]

The position of moral and social leadership accorded to the

Scots in Davies' novels reflects an understanding of the

historic role which people of Scottish descent have played in

Canadian society. W. Stanford Reid comments that among the

early immigrants to British North America the Scots, more

than any other ethnic group, tended to spread out into every

part of the nation.[47] They were, in other words, the least

ghettoized of the immigrant populations. Thus, Margaret

Laurence can describe a mythical town in Manitoba, over a

thousand miles from Deptford, and find a dominant Scottish

presence not unlike that described by Davies. Her character,

Rachel Cameron, in A Jest of God observes that, in Manawaka,

"'half the town is Scots descent and the other half is

Ukrainian.....The Ukrainians knew how to be the better grain

farmers, but the Scots know how to be almightier than anyone

but God.'"[48]

The politics of the nation have been influenced

proportionally more by the Scots than by any other ethnic

group. In the report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism

and _Biculturalism_, Richard Van Loon comments that, during the
first four decades of this century, persons of Scottish
descent accounted for over 25% of the membership of the House
of Commons.[49]   This represented a larger group than the
Members of Parliament of either English or French descent.

The educational institutions of the young nation were
influenced by the strong priority placed on learning by the
Scottish immigrants. W. Stanford Reid comments:

> One of the reasons for Scotland's
> development was its unique emphasis
> upon education ever since the
> establishment of the Reformed Church
> which had sought to set up a
> nationwide parish school system....
> ..The result was Scottish intellectual
> expansion and development which
> sometimes produced the scepticism
> of the philosopher David Hume and
> at others the piety and religious
> vigour of the preacher Robert
> Haldane, but laid a large part
> of the foundations for the development
> of English-speaking Canadian
> education in the nineteenth
> century.[50]

This influential ethnic minority in the cultural fabric
of Canada takes on a particular face when described in the
literature of the nation. The Scottish visage is dominated
by an unadventurous materialism and a high degree of self-
righteousness. Mordecai Richler speaks of the domination of
the Scots in business and politics using this image. He
argues that it was an unimaginative prudence on the part of
the Scottish mercantile class which led to a significant
difference between the aspirations of Canadians and
Americans:

> Our problem, unique in the Western

world, perhaps, was not an indigenous
                    buccaneering capitalist class, indifferent
                    to those they exploited; yet intrepid
                    and imaginative nation-builders.
                    Our problem was the Scots; the most
                    inept and timorous capitalists in
                    the West. Not builders, but vendors,
                    or, at best, circumspect investors
                    in insurance and trust companies.
                                                        51

In <u>Two</u> <u>Solitudes</u> this image of the Scots--an image

characterized by cautious materialism and self-

righteousness-- is reiterated in Hugh MacLennan's description

of the Methuen family:

                    The Methuens felt themselves as
                    much an integral part of Montreal
                    as the mountain around which
                    the city was built. They had
                    been wealthy for a sufficient
                    number of generations to
                    pride themselves on never
                    making a display. Instead,
                    they incubated their money,
                    increasing it by compound
                    interest and the growth of
                    the Canadian Pacific Railway.
                    They were all Scotch-Canadians
                    who went to a Presbyterian
                    church every Sunday and
                    contributed regularly to
                    charities and hospitals....
                    ....No Methuen found it
                    possible to feel inferior
                    to the English in any
                    respect whatever; rather
                    they considered themselves
                    an extension of the British
                    Isles, more vigorous than
                    the English because their
                    blood was Scotch, more
                    moral because they were
                    Presbyterians. Every
                    branch of the family
                    enjoyed a quiet satisfaction
                    whenever visiting Englishmen
                    entered their homes and
                    remarked in surprise that
                    no one could possibly
                    mistake them for Americans,
                                                52
        The Scottish Protestants of Canadian literature are also

                                94

portrayed as the exemplars of those who would repress the

passionate side of life. Control of the passions is an

important value embedded in the lives of Davies' characters.

Such control is a legacy of the dominant social and

theological ethos represented by the Scottish Presbyterian.

William Westfall in an article entitled, "Order and

Experience", uses the example of the most powerful Anglican

cleric of the 19th century, Bishop Strachan, to illustrate

this emphasis on the rational control of human appetite

prevalent in the formative period of religious development in

English Canada. Strachan, the ecclesiastical power in the

conservative "Family Compact" of Upper Canada, had begun his

career as a Presbyterian minister. His writings bear the

mark of this Calvinist background. With reference to one of

Strachan's sermons, Westfall states:

> It is 'the purpose of creation,'
> John Strachan explained in a sermon
> in 1825, to 'confer happiness upon
> a greater number of rational beings.'
> Religion, he believed, should restrain
> selfishness and the passions, it
> should instruct the people in the
> benefits of living a rational and
> pious life--and these benefits he
> expressed in terms of 'true happiness'
> in this world and in the world to
> come. In articulating these words
> and phrases, Strachan set out in
> shorthand fashion a pattern of
> religious interpretation that he
> shared not only with his Anglican
> brethren and the vast majority of
> the Presbyterian clergy but also with
> most educated people throughout the
> English-speaking world.
> 53

This style of religion melded well with the needs of a

culture confronting the frontier. George Grant reminds us
that a puritanical suspicion of bodily passion could be used
in a society which needed to control non-productive human
desires and activity in order to maintain its over-riding
commitment to the conquering and taming of territory.
Control of the body and an ideological adherence to the
techniques of mundane conquest are complimentary:

> Where the ordinary Catholic might
> restrain the body within a corporately
> ordained tradition of a liturgy rhythmic
> in its changes between control and
> release, the Protestant had solitary
> responsiblity all the time to impose
> the restraint. When one contemplates
> the conquest of nature by technology
> one must remember that the conquest
> had to include our own bodies.
> 54

For Davies, a world-view dominated by the need for
control of the irrational impulses of humanity is
characteristic of the small-town Protestant culture about
which he writes. Emotional outbursts are to be discouraged.
In _Fifth Business_ the use of the phrase "reading the Riot
Act" in an interchange between the Scottish doctor,
McCausland, and Amasa Dempster, the Baptist parson,
exemplifies the high stock placed on emotional control:

> He [Dempster] laboured these themes
> with as much eloquence as he could
> summon, until Dr. McCausland was
> compelled to read the Riot Act to
> him, in such terms as a tight-lipped
> Presbyterian uses when reading the
> Riot Act to an emotional Baptist.
> This term--'reading the Riot Act'--
> was my mother's; she had thoroughly
> approved of the doctor's performance,
> for she had the real Scots
> satisfaction in hearing somebody
> justifiably scolded and set to

rights.
Expression of feeling is suppressed in characters such as
Hector Mackelwraith, in Leaven of Malice, who proclaims, "I
will submit to anything rather than make a display of my
feelings" and in Magnus Eisengrim who, in World of Wonders,
manifests a cool detachment with regard to the subject of the
mother he has not seen since the age of ten.

In The Manticore, David Staunton describes a visual
reminder of the Canadian attitude toward human passion
revealed in the Canadian Royal Arms in which the Lion and the
Unicorn:

> are shown without their privy parts..
> ....I have sat in court and looked
> at those pitifully deprived animals
> and thought how they exemplified our
> attitude toward justice. Everything
> that spoke of passion--and when you talk
> of passion you talk of morality in
> one way or another--was ruled out of
> order or disguised as something else.
The lack of passion promoted by the cultural milieu of
Davies' characters is expressed in every aspect of life from
familial relations to the justice system. Staunton's comment
about the Royal Arms points to one of the most sensitive
representations of this dispassionate ethos. The missing
parts on the Lion and the Unicorn represent an asexuality
which permeates the lives of Davies' characters.

Sexual activity does not play a significant role in the
lives of many of Davies' characters. Ramsay disposes of all
but one of the casual sexual encounters of his life, prior to
his "liberating" experience with Liesl, in one off-hand
remark in his memoirs.   The one affair receiving greater

attention--that with the English nurse, Diana Marfleet--is
short lived due to the Oedipal nature of the relationship.
The sexual initiation which occurs with Diana does not carry
as much lasting significance as the name change which occurs
just before they part.[59]   David Staunton, in The Manticore,
admits to only one sexual encounter--a scene manufactured by
a crass father wishing to initiate his teenage son--in his
account of his life during his analysis with Jo von Haller.

The characters who do engage in frequent sexual activity
do so as a symptom of leading a non-reflective life, as in
the case of Boy Staunton, or as the acting out of physical
urges consciously divorced from any sense of moral value, as
in the case of John Parlabane in The Rebel Angels. Davies'
characters are marked by a sexual repression which expresses
itself in either a neglect of the physical dimension of life
or a promiscuity which expresses an unintegrated persona.

Repression of the sensual is also reflected in attitudes
toward physical appearance in Davies' version of Canadian
culture. Physical beauty is seen to be a trivial matter.
Physical features which connote a sense of vulnerability to
the joy and pain of human existence are viewed with disfavour
in the society represented by Deptford. In his description
of Mrs. Dempster, Davies speaks of the "uncommon" quality of
her physical appearance and of its effect on the community:

> Mrs. Dempster was not pretty--
> we understood prettiness and
> guardedly admitted it as a
> pleasant, if needless, thing in
> a woman--but she had a gentleness
> of expression and a delicacy of

> colour that was uncommon. My
> mother, who had strong features
> and stood for no nonsense from
> her hair, said that Mrs. Dempster
> had a face like a pan of milk.
> Mrs. Dempster was small and slight,
> and even the clothes approved
> for a preacher's wife did not
> conceal the fact that she had a
> girlish figure and a light step.
> 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.
> She was a nice little thing but
> was that soft voice ever going to
> dominate a difficult meeting of
> the Ladies' Aid? And why did she
> laugh so much when nobody else
> could see anything to laugh at?
>   60

This attitude toward physical appearance is consistent with

the cultural expectations expressed by other Canadian

writers. In Two Solitudes, Hugh MacLennan's Methuen family

prides itself on a lack of frivolous beauty in its women:

> Methuen women never ran to beauty
> because too much in the way of
> looks in a woman was distrusted
> by the family. They were expected
> to be irreproachable wives and
> solid mothers of future Methuens,
> not females who might stimulate
> those pleasures the men of the
> family believed had caused the
> ruination of the Babylonians,
> Greeks, Romans, French, Italians,
> Spanish, Portuguese, Austrians,
> Russians and various other minor
> races of the world.
>   61

Margaret Laurence's Hagar Shipley, conscious of the cultural

demand that physical appearance must be subdued, carefully

chooses a "muted and suitable" gray flowered dress for the occasion of a visit from the minister. The dress must contain "nothing to jar God's little man".[62]

Suspicion of physical beauty extends to every part of life in the small Protestant town. In Deptford there is, what Ramsay calls, a conspicuous lack of an aesthetic sense because "we were all too much the descendents of hard-bitten pioneers to wish for or encourage any such thing, and we gave hard names to qualities that, in a more sophisticated society, might have had value."[63] This aesthetic poverty in Canadian culture is revealed in Davies' early dramas which, according to Morley, have a recurring theme of "the state of cultural malnutrition which prevails in his land."[64]

The architecture of the land reveals this resistance to imagination in the realm of human creation. In World of Wonders, Eisengrim is struck by the fact that many of the theatres in the small Canadian towns seem to have been built with big ideas "and then abandoned before they were equipped."[65] This description is reminiscent of a commentary on Canadian architecture found in Leaven of Malice:

> Now the peculiar quality of this
> picturesqueness does not lie in a
> superficial resemblance to the
> old world; it is, rather, a compound
> of colonialism, romanticism and
> sturdy defiance of taste; it is
> a fascinating and distinguished
> ugliness which is best observed
> in the light of Canadian November
> and December afternoons.....This
> is the architecture of a Northern
> people, upon which the comfort of
> England and the luxury of the

United States have fallen short
of their full effect.66

Passion is ruled out in every aspect of life including

religion. In Fifth Business Dunstan Ramsay differentiates

between his growing intellectual interest in religion and the

possibility of "becoming religious". He makes the point that

"the Presbyterianism of my childhood effectively insulated me

against any enthusiastic abandonment to faith."[67]   In A

Mixture of Frailties, Davies parodies the non-rational

excesses of a Christian sect which is placed clearly outside

the mainstream of Protestantism in Canadian culture. Monica

Gall belongs to a sect, The Thirteeners, founded by a

salesman who had been influenced by Henry Ford's comment that

history was bunk:

> History was indeed bunk; the
> seeming division of history
> into years and eras was an
> illusion; the whole world of
> the senses was an illusion,
> obviously created by the
> Devil.....Christ, Moses,
> Jeremiah--they were all right
> here, living and breathing
> beside us, if we could just
> "make contact".
> [68]

In a culture suspicious of passion, the Scottish

Protestants, according to Davies, become the self-appointed

arbiters of propriety. In Deptford, the Scottish

Presbyterians consider themselves to the models of moral

rectitude and self-control for the rest of the community. In

an earlier novel, Tempest Tost, Hector Mackliwraith, the son

of a Presbyterian minister, feels both the status and the

responsibility of his relationship to the clergy elite of the

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small town of Salterton. As a son of the manse, "he was expected to be an example not only to all Presbyterian boys in the district but a reproach to boys of lesser faiths."[69] When he is punished by strapping in the local school, his fall from grace is far greater than would have been the case for one not so directly related to what Davies calls the "Sanhedrin"--the clergy of the small community:

> But both the principal and Hector knew what was happening; a reputation was falling to ruin; Hector Mackilwraith, a preacher's son, was Getting the Strap, and the shadow of corporal punishment had fallen across a pulpit. In such a community as that, the preachers formed a Sanhedrin, and as they were severe towards others, they were harshly judged when disgrace touched them.[70]

Binding all of these strands together is the dynamic of guilt. A comment in _World of Wonders_ regarding Eisengrim's background is representative of the burden carried by Davies' protagonists. As one "brought up in a strict, unrelenting form of puritanism," Eisengrim finds that many years after his escape from Deptford, "he still blames himself whenever he can."[71] In the aftermath of the snowball incident in _Fifth Business_, Ramsay speaks of the power of guilt when he comments that he was "alone with my guilt, and it tortured me. I was a Presbyterian child and I knew a good deal about damnation."[72] The Protestant protagonists of Davies' novels express an awareness of the role played by guilt in exercising control over the emergence of the emotive side of life. In Liesel's encounters with Ramsay she must counter

his guilt-driven need to make himself responsible for other

people's troubles.[73]

ii. The resistance of the northern mystic

In the shadow of the Scottish banker, in Davies'

assessment of Canadian identity, lies the image of the

northern mystic. It is the mystic who challenges the subdued

materialism and emotional inhibitions of the banker. In

Fifth Business Dunstan Ramsay offers this description of the

contrast between Boy Staunton and himself: "the reality of

life [for Boy] lay in external things, whereas for me the

only reality was of the spirit".[74] Boy's life has been

driven by the acquisition of worldly success and an

accompanying disinterest in the inner life. When Ramsay

suggests to Staunton, "'I'm simply trying to recover

something of the totality of your life,'"[75] he is

articulating the dichotomy between an external world in which

there is active engagement and an internal world which has

suffered neglect. For Davies, Staunton represents the

Scottish banker--albeit, an adventuresome version of that

image--side of the Canadian personality which requires the

presence of the northern mystic in order to live an

integrated life. Ramsay, on the other hand, represents the

resistance in the culture to the banker. His life betrays an

early rejection of the practical dimension of living in

favour of a gradual discovery of non-material reality. Early

in the novel Ramsay comments: "The Scottish practicality

that I had imitated from my parents was not really in grain

with me; I cared too little for difficulties."[76] Thus, magic

and hagiography become the focal points of Ramsay's life. Ramsay, however, does not neglect entirely the pursuit of material prosperity. With Staunton's help, he actually amasses a small fortune through prudent investments. Davies does not make Ramsay a caricature of the transformed mystic who bears no resemblance to the culture which nurtured him. Commenting on his modest prosperity, Ramsay says, "I make no apology for benefiting from the advice of a man I sneered at in my mind; I was too much a Scot to let a dollar get away from me if it came into my clutch."[77] Ramsay does not abandon the culture of the Scottish banker; rather he is able to discover another dimension of himself which, neglected in his upbringing, becomes primary in his life and provides a balance to the restrained practicality of his background.

Nancy Bjerring in her article, "Deep in the Old Man's Puzzle" argues that Ramsay's new world--the mystical side of his being--represents a possibility which stands as an enticement to a whole culture reared with a strong emphasis on practicality:

> And we realize that Davies means
> that all Canadians who have grown
> up in a stolid, practical atmosphere
> crave a knowledge of the marvellous,
> and that this craving for the
> marvellous is really a craving
> for self-knowledge--for the
> knowledge of something which has
> been repressed but manifests
> itself in a fascination with
> the mystical.[78]

Davies gives this fascination with the mystical a geographical focus. Just as the Scottish banker side of the

Canadian <u>persona</u> is to be found in the small town life of Salterton and Deptford, so, the realm of the mystic is to be found in the urbanity and sophistication of the old world-- Europe. As a young boy, Dunstan Ramsay is aware of the difference which exists between rural Ontario and Europe. When the Baptist parson lashes out at Ramsay for showing card tricks to his young son, Ramsay's response contrasts a romantic vision of Paris with the mundane reality of Deptford:

> All that dim but glittering
> vision I had formed of Paris,
> with Robert Houdin doing marvels
> to delight grand people, had
> been dragged down by this
> Deptford parson, who know
> nothing of such things and just
> hated whatever did not belong
> to life at the $550-a-year
> level. I wanted a better
> life than that. But I had
> been worsted by moral bullying,
> by Dempster's conviction that
> he was right and I was wrong,
> and that gave him an authority
> over me based on feeling rather
> than reason: it was my first
> encounter with the emotional
> power of popular morality.[79]

In <u>The</u> <u>Manticore</u>, David Staunton is drawn to the Jung Institute for what he calls two negative reasons. "The Jungians had two negative recommendations: the Freudians hated them, and Zurich was a long way from Toronto."[80] This pattern is repeated in <u>A</u> <u>Mixture</u> <u>of</u> <u>Frailties</u> in which the liberation of Monica Gall's repressed passion is coincidental with her move from Salterton to London.

The vocabulary employed by Davies' characters indicates the attractive possibility of a mystic spirit to be found in

places other than the small Canadian town. John Lennox in

his description of the use of language by Davies'

protagonists claims:

> Implicitly or explicitly, the
> vocabulary, idiom and tone of the
> Deptford narrators claim
> international citizenship rather
> than any specific patriotism.
> As a consequence, their stories
> are inflected and deflected out
> of Canada to a country 'where
> big spiritual adventures are
> possible.'"
>   81

The wise men and women of Davies' narrative who are able to

discover the numinous in spite of their prosaic backgrounds

speak in a voice which stands in sharp contrast to the casual

conversational tones of mainstream Canadian culture. Clara

Thomas comments:

> The Domdaniel voice [in A
> Mixture of Frailties] is
> a familiar one in all of
> Davies' writing and some-
> times prejudicial, in its
> set didactic passages, to the
> flow of his narrative. It
> is close to the voice of
> Samuel Marchbanks, though
> Marchbanks often has a
> self-consciously comic
> tone; it is the voice of
> the author himself in
> A Voice in the Attic;
> it is echoed in the Deptford
> trilogy by Father Blazon
> and, sometimes, by the voice
> of Dunstan Ramsay himself.
> It is an eighteenth century
> voice of reason and balance,
> certain of its moral and
> ethical standards but
> broadly and humanely aware
> of the complexities involved
> in translating them into
> life and action.
>   82

Davies' characters discover the hidden mysticism of
their personalities in physical movement away from a context
which is, from Davies' perspective, too much the one-sided
world of the Scottish banker to allow such discoveries. This
phenomenon of the necessity of movement distinguishes him
from other English Canadian writers who, while recognizing
the repressive puritanism of their culture, maintain the
possibilty of alternative visions emerging without the
necessity of movement to other societies. Margaret
Laurence's tenacious women, for example, discover intimations
of grace and freedom from repression where they live. The
mystical dimension of life can be found, for W. O. Mitchell,
in the landscape which surrounds the Protestant prairie town:

> Well, the prairie does create
> mystics.....You walked out
> onto the prairie, onto great
> areas of still-untilled land,
> with the prairie wool stuff,
> and I guess that makes mystics,
> people who, without being aware
> of it, in some strange way
> are in tune with wind and
> grass and sky.
> 83

Davies' characters do not experience new possibilities by
remaining where they are. Restricted vision is so powerful
in the formative communities of Davies' people that physical
movement to another place where "spiritual adventures are
possible" is essential. Ramsay, Staunton, Eisengrim, Gall,
Cornish and Parlabane must all travel away from the small
Canadian environment to another place in order to seek
wholeness.

but also the same destination--Europe. Europe is an appropriate place in which to discover the hidden mysticism of the Canadian because it is not a completely alien land. Europe, in fact, represents a memory of the world prior to the emergence of the age of progress and the new world. In Technology and Empire, George Grant expresses this notion:

> By touching Europe I do not
> mean as a fascinating museum
> or a place of diversion, but
> to have felt the remnants of a
> Christianity which was more
> than simply the legitimizing of
> progress and which still held
> in itself the fruits of
> contemplation....But the
> remnants of such a Europe
> were only one removed from
> what was one's own. It was
> the seedbed out of which
> the attenuated Christianity
> of our secularised Calvinism
> had come.
> 84

Europe stands as a reminder that, for Davies, the mysticism found in the Canadian ethos is rooted in the past rather than in nature.

C. Reaction to the World in Gnosticism and the Novels of Robertson Davies: The Dynamic of Escape

The distance between the perception of the world found in gnostic literature and that found in Davies' novels is obvious. The radical dualism of the gnostic cosmology does not allow for a tension between good and evil within the mundane realm. There are no redeeming features in the gnostic picture of creation.

The Canadian context, out of which Davies writes, is not portrayed as a valueless environment. His characters do

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receive something of worth from their culture. Deptford may

lack an aesthetic sense and it may encourage a cautious

approach to life, but it also has "much to show of virtue,

dignity, and even of nobility."[85]

Nonetheless, the small town birthplaces of Davies'

characters are not sufficient in themselves as a setting for

an existence characterized by self-knowledge. Recognizing

both sides of the Canadian personality--the Scottish banker

and the northern mystic--requires a journey. That which

obscures the mystical in the culture must be escaped.

Another place is needed to balance the place of one's birth.

It is in the dynamic of escape that the affinity between

Davies' novels and the gnostic spirit becomes apparent. The

gnostic must escape the captivity of earthly existence in

order to discover his or her true self. The protagonist of

Davies' novels must escape the repression of small town

puritanism in order to discover those dimensions of one's

being which will enable life to be possessed "as a whole--the

bad with the good."[86]

While the understanding of the world may be very

different for the character in Davies' novel, he or she does

share the gnostic urge to free oneself from an unsatisfactory

environment for the sake of something better. The need to

escape is a shared reality for both Davies and the ancient

gnostic.

IV.   THE WAY OF ESCAPE: <u>GNOSIS</u>

IV. The Way of Escape--Gnosis

A. The Concept of Gnosis in Gnostic Literature

A negative valuation of the existing order--whether that order is perceived to be the whole of creation as in gnosticism or the repressive small town culture found in the novels of Robertson Davies--leads to the desire to escape. The notion of the earth resulting from a creative act born out of ignorance and vanity and the corresponding sense of alienation felt by the creatures of the earth are marks of the gnostic spirit. The vision of return to the true God prompted by the existence of the divine spark within the alienated creature represents another mark of the gnostic spirit. These two marks--a perception of creation as evil and a vision of a true home beyond the realm of creation--can be identified as opposite poles in the geography of gnosticism. Movement from one pole to the other is both possible and desirable. A way can be found for the homeless creature to move from the sojourn on an earth which is not home to the ultimate spiritual plane in which reunion with the source of the divine and true home are to be found. In "The Exegesis on the Soul", an anonymous tractate which has been dated as early as 200 C. E., the soul is cast in a feminine form which has her origin as an androgynous virgin dwelling alone with the Father. Her fall is characterized by embodiment on earth and seduction into a life of prostitution. In the midst of carnal captivity on earth, the soul is reminded of her heavenly origin. This is followed by a casting off of the false earthly home and a return to the

true home of heaven:

> Now its is fitting that the soul
> regenerate herself and become
> again as she formerly was. The
> soul then moves of her own accord.
> And she received the divine nature
> from the Father for her rejuvenation,
> so that she might be restored to
> the place where originally she had
> been. This is the resurrection
> that is from the dead. This is
> the ransom from captivity. This
> is the upward journey of ascent to
> heaven.
> 1

This upward movement occurs as a result of the resources of

the inner self--the soul. The energy which propels the

movement of the soul is <u>gnosis</u>.

An earth born out of ignorance can only be challenged

and ultimately abandoned through the employment of

ignorance's opposite--<u>gnosis</u>. Gnosis is the <u>modus operandi</u>

by which the alienated creature can make the transition from

the homeless state of existence on earth to the homecoming to

be found in union with the divine. <u>Gnosis</u> is the vehicle

which propels the human creature on his/her long journey of

the spirit.

The uniqueness of this pivotal concept of <u>gnosis</u> found

in the gnostic literature of the ancient world can be

observed when it is examined in contrast to the evolution of

the Judeo-Christian understanding of knowledge.

<u>i. Gnosis in the Judeo-Christian scriptures</u>

In the Hebrew scriptures the word which most closely

corresponds to <u>gnosis</u> is <u>yada</u> [יָדַע]. <u>Yada</u> is a

term which is characterized by an active, concrete

relationship. It has a dynamic rather than a contemplative emphasis. In his study, <u>Gnosis</u>, Rudolf Bultmann comments: "When knowledge [in the Old Testament] is referred to in a special sense, it means knowledge of God, not as existing for ever, but a making a demand, whether through commandments or through mighty acts...."[2]

Knowledge is given in the midst of divine activity. God's acts of justice in human history make human knowledge of God possible. Human acts of obedience are the sign that such knowledge has been received. The <u>Dictionary</u> <u>of</u> <u>Hebrew</u> emphasizes this active, relational quality of <u>yada</u> when it contrasts knowledge and ignorance of God:

> "To know Yahweh" refers to a practical,
> religio-ethical relationship. Yahweh
> will deliver (plt; piel) and protect
> (sgh; piel) those who know (yd') his
> name and cleave (hsq) to him (Ps. 91: 14)
> .....All who are upright of heart
> (yisre-leb) know him (Ps. 36: 11 [10])
> ....."Not to know Yahweh" appears in
> combination with parallel verbs as a
> way of expressing apostasy and religio-
> ethical decline. Those who do not
> know Yahweh "sin" (hata) against him
> (1 S. 2: 25), they are "ungodly" (awal)
> (Job 18: 21), they "swear, lie, kill,
> steal, and commit adultery" (Hos. 4: 1f.),
> they are treacherous adulterers (Jer 9: 1 [2]),
> they "deceive" (v. 2 [3]) and "slander"
> (v. 3 [4]). Whole series of sins stand
> in parallel with lo yd .[3]

The use of <u>yada</u> in the Hebrew scriptures assumes an integral relationship between morality and knowledge. "Doing" is the verbal prerequisite for knowledge.

In Hellenic thought the essential verbal form is "seeing". As Bultmann points out in his study of the concept of knowledge: "Ultimate truth for the Greeks means the

reality which underlies all appearances, and this determines the nature of knowledge of the truth."[4] If knowledge, for the Hebrews, is to be found in divine activity and human response, for the Greeks, it is in the discovery of the forms and principles which shape that which we perceive with our senses. The forms transcend the mundane. They are not, however, as radically distinct from their earthly counterparts as is the case in gnostic dualism. The transitory counterparts of the eternal forms are not cast in a negative light. Kurt Rudolph comments:

> It [the philosophically oriented
> dualism of Plato] knows the two
> levels of existence: the spiritually
> eternal ideas and their transitory
> material (spatial) counterparts,
> which form the cosmos; the latter
> do indeed signify a loss of being,
> but nevertheless belong to the
> good part of creation....[5]

In the New Testament, numerous references can be cited which indicate a continuity with the Hebrew bias toward the essential relationship between knowledge and moral activity. The New Testament version of this connection can be seen in passages such as Paul's letter to the Philippians in which the apostle writes: "I pray that your love will keep on growing more and more, together with true knowledge and perfect judgement, so that you will be able to choose what is best."[6] Knowledge is dependent on the moral command of a God who articulates divine will in the midst of human history. "But it was the Law that made me know what sin s. If the Law had not said, 'Do not desire what belongs to someone

else,' I would not have known such a desire."[7]   In contrast
to the correlation between knowledge and moral activity
revealed in these passages, there are other references in the
Christian scriptures which would seem to lean toward a more
speculative notion of knowledge. In Paul's discussion of the
issue of food offered to idols (1 Corinthians 8) the contrast
made between those who, through weakness of conscience,
believe that food can belong to an idol and those "who have
so-called 'knowledge'"[8] does seem to imply that, for Paul,
there are those whose knowledge of the reality ("one God")
behind appearance (food sacrificed to idols) puts them into a
category which has moved away from a Hebraic identification
of knowledge with law toward a more Hellenic understanding.
It is important, however, to make the point that while Paul's
understanding of knowledge does bear the influence of
Hellenized Judaism, it remains distinct from the perception
of knowledge found in gnostic literature. In this regard,
Matthew Black comments, "I am, in any case, convinced that
virtually everything in 1 Corinthians thought to represent a
'gnostic way of thinking' can be explained on the basis of
Hellenistic Jewish speculative wisdom such as that
encountered in Philo."[9] The distance between Paul's Hellenic
Judaism and gnostic speculation can be observed in the fact
that the theological argument encountered in Paul's letters
often finds itself focused on gnostic opposition to his
ministry. Bultmann itemizes the points of tension between
Paul and the gnostics:

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> His [Paul's] enemies are proved
> to have been Gnostics by the
> way in which they strove after
> speculative wisdom (1 Cor 1: 17ff.),
> boosting of their gnosis and of
> the authority which it gave them
> in matters of personal behaviour
> (1 Cor 6: 12 ff.; 8:1ff.); and
> to proofs drawn from the spiritual
> sphere (2 Cor. 10 - 13) may be added
> a certain tendency toward asceticism
> (1 Cor 7), and the denial of a
> bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15).
> In his opposition to them Paul
> held fast to the special quality
> of genuine Christian knowledge,
> but at the same time appropriated
> to a certain degree Gnostic terms
> and ways of presenting problems.[10]

The fact that those in the community with gnostic tendencies are perceived to be among the primary opponents of Paul's teaching reinforces the notion that while Paul's definition of knowledge does bear the marks of a Judaism influenced by Hellenism, it remains distinct from the perception of knowledge found in early gnostic literature.

The issue of the Biblical understanding of knowledge also arises in relation to the Gospel of John. The gospel places a strong emphasis on the epistemological gulf between humanity and God. Unmediated knowledge of God on the part of humankind does not exist. Jesus, the one who does know the Father, speaks of the reality of "not knowing" among the people:

> As Jesus taught in the Temple,
> he said in a loud voice, 'Do
> you really know me and know
> where I am from? I have not
> come on my own authority. He
> who sent me, however, is truthful.
> You do not know him, but I

know him, because I come from
him and he sent me.
                              11
Jesus' mission is to make the unknown God known. "No one has

ever seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is
                                                          12
at the Father's side, he has made him known."   The Gospel's

proclamation of Jesus as the one who mediates knowledge of

God has led Rudolf Bultmann to speculate about the possible

influence of a gnostic redeemer myth on the writing of the

Gospel. The redeemer myth posits the concept of the Son of

God appearing in corporeal form in order to liberate the

fragments of light imprisoned in human bodies and to return

them to their heavenly home. John's gospel which speaks of

Jesus as the pre-existent Word whose life brings light to

humankind seems, according to Bultmann, to reflect the

influence of the redeemer myth. The ambiguity regarding the

nature of pre-Christian gnosticism makes Bultmann's thesis
                        13
difficult to prove.   The connection between gnosis in the

Gospel of John and in gnostic literature is not dependent,

however, on the credibility of an influence of one literature

upon the other. Frederik Wisse maintains that the issue is

not whether or not the gnostic redeemer myth influenced

John's Christology. Rather, given the heterodox nature of

ancient gnostic thought, the concern should be around the

ways in which the gospel reflects a gnostic spirit:

          The question should be whether
          the Gospel of John stands in the
          uncontrolled speculative tradition
          of Gnostic literature and whether
          is shares in some way the Gnostic's
          pessimistic world view and elitist

> self-understanding. I think
> the answer is affirmative.
<superscript>14</superscript>

Wisse's statement reflects the difficulty of making a clear

distinction between the literature which found its way into

the Christian canon and that literature identified as

gnostic. While specific differences may be obvious in areas

such as the interpretation or allegorization of Hebrew myths,
the general mood of the two literatures can bear marks of

similarity. This common spirit can be attributed to the fact

that the Gospel of John, like the letters of Paul, emerges

from a period in which a stong Hellenistic influence was

being felt in the Judaism of the time. [15] The gnostic writers

reflect the same background. George McRae stresses the

importance of recognizing the common ancestry of both

biblical literature and gnostic writings:

> For my part, I believe that
> Gnosticism arose as a revolutionary
> reaction in Hellenized Jewish
> wisdom and apocalyptic circles.
> It became a rival of Christianity
> not only in the second century
> when the ecclesiastical writers
> such as Justin and Irenaeus
> identified Gnostic leaders and
> sects, but from the very
> beginnings of Christian
> reflection on the significance
> and message of Jesus. What
> made the rivalry more acute
> --and paradoxically the more
> influential in shaping the
> formulations of some early
> Christians--was the natural
> affinity arising from a certain
> common parentage. The
> Gnosticism of the Nag
> Hammadi documents is not
> a Christian heresy but,
> if anything, a Jewish
> heresy, just as primitive
> Christianity itself should
> be regarded as a Jewish

heresy or set of Jewish
heresies.

The evolution of the Biblical understanding of knowledge is
characterized by a tension between the concrete, relational
and ethically based word, yada, in the Hebrew scriptures and
the more speculative and esoteric concept of gnosis. At the
time of the writing of those letters and gospels which would
become a part of the New Testament canon and the gnostic
texts, this tension was pervasive. As McRae argues,
Hellenized Judaism--characterized by the tension between yada
and gnosis--formed the common parentage for two bodies of
literature which were to be later characterized by the Church
fathers as antithetical. The distinction between orthodox
Christianity and gnosticism with regard to the definition of
gnosis is most appropriately seen as a difference in degree
rather than kind. G. C. Stead argues, for example,
that "the fragments of Valentinus, taken by themselves, would
give us no ground for supposing anything but a Platonizing
biblical theologian of some originality, whose work hardly
strayed beyond the still undefined limits of Christian
orthodoxy."¹⁷

ii. The distinctive character of the gnostic
understanding of gnosis

Just when one becomes comfortable with the notion that the
gnostic spirit was so generalized in the first and second
century world of the near east that any distinction between
the understanding of knowledge found the Christian canon and
that found in gnostic texts must be seen in terms of nuance
rather than dramatic divergence, one is reminded that, at the

level of function, a dichotomy between the two literatures is real. It is the purpose more than the content of _gnosis_ which betrays the difference between orthodox Christianity and ancient gnosticism. In the Christian scriptures the ethical dimension of knowledge is not lost. Knowledge of a God who is righteous leads to right behaviour in the recipient:

> We ask God to fill you with the
> knowledge of his will, with all
> the wisdom and understanding
> that his Spirit gives. Then
> you will be able to live as the
> Lord wants and will always do
> what pleases him. Your lives
> will produce all kinds of
> good deeds, and you will grow
> in your knowledge of God.
> 18

This identification of ethical behaviour as one of the fruits of knowledge is reiterated in other scriptural texts. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 8, Bultmann indicates that, in the letter, Paul affirms that "knowledge of the one God is not a theoretical speculation which gives its possessor liberty to live as he likes (verse 9), but is only genuine when accompanied by love;" and that, "love of God is not a mystical relationship, but expresses itself in brotherly love." [19] The retention of this Hebraic emphasis on an ethical response to knowledge of God provides us with one of the clearest marks of distinction between _gnosis_ in the New Testament and _gnosis_ in the gnostic texts.

The ancient gnostic texts reveal an understanding of _gnosis_ which is primarily ontological in character. If the goodness of creation, affirmed in Judeo-Christian orthodoxy,

has no place in ancient gnosticism, then, the notion of the possible goodness of human activity in creation must be seen as equally alien. The issue, for the gnostics, is not right behaviour in a world which is hopelessly flawed. Rather, the emphasis is on escape from the world altogether. In this sense, knowledge has no this-worldly quality. In his discussion of Valentianism, Hans Jonas says, "'knowledge', together with its privative, 'ignorance', is raised to an ontological position of the first order: both are principles of objective and total existence, not merely of subjective and private experience."[20]

The gnostic concern that the outcome of gnosis be seen in exclusively cosmic terms results from the perception of what it is that gnosis stands over against. In Judeo-Christian orthodoxy, it is human sin which is the reality to which "knowledge of God" adresses itself. In gnosticism, the problem to be addressed by gnosis is not to be found in the this-worldly activity of humans but, rather, in the divine ignorance which results in the fall. Jonas describes this relationship in mathematical terms:

> This the grand 'pneumatic equation'
> of Valentinian thought: the human-
> individual event of pneumatic
> knowledge is the inverse
> equivalent of the pre-cosmic
> universal event of divine
> ignorance, and in its redeeming
> effect of the same ontological
> order. The actualization of
> knowledge in the person is at the
> same time an act in the general
>
> ground of being.[21]

<u>Gnosis</u>, in this sense, is focused on knowledge of the
unknowable God.

The notion of knowing an unknowable God is the content
of what Hans Jonas calls the paradox of gnostic religion.
"The beginning and end of the paradox that is gnostic
religion is the unknown God himself who, unknowable on
principle, because the 'other' to everything known, is yet
the object of a knowledge and even asks to be known."[22]
Paradox is not, however, unique to gnostic religion. The
tension between the hidden and revealed God of Biblical faith
also falls under the category of paradox. Like the process
of knowing, the object of knowing in both gnostic and
orthodox literature is cast in a similar mode. Valentinus'
assertion that the "pre-existent perfect aeon" is
"inconceivable and invisible, eternal and uncreated"[23] paints
a picture of an unknowable God which is not that dissimilar
to the notion in Judeo-Christian thought of a God who is
beyond human comprehension. When Valentinus speaks of the
other side of the paradox and proclaims that true spiritual
redemption has been achieved when "the knowledge of the All
is sufficient for them,"[24] the reader is reminded that the
<u>telos</u> of the Judeo-Christian journey is unity with God.
Despite such seeming parallels, there is an essential
difference to be discerned between the gnostic understanding
of knowledge of the divine and that found in orthodox
theology. Jean Danielou identifies this difference by
reminding us that for Jewish tradition, the transcendent God

is incomprehensible in the sense that God cannot be measured by human standards. God's existence is made known to humanity through the acts of God in human history. Later Hellenic influence on the biblical tradition carries the Platonic notion that, while God is greater than any concept the mind can form, freedom from the restraints of the sensible world does allow one to know the essence of the divine. Danielou argues that these possible ways of knowing are denied in gnostic thought. "For the Gnostic, both God's essence and his existence are unknown. Only gnosis overcomes the situation."[25] In other words, Biblical theology finds the paradox of knowing and not knowing God played out in an interplay between transcendence and immanence. Gnostic thought, which allows no possibility of divine immanence, locates the paradox completely in the transcendent realm. Such a radical separation is alien to both the Hebrew and Platonic mind. Perkins makes this point when he says, "If this rupture between the transcendent divine and the cosmos might seem strange to pagans, the philosophic passivity of the Gnostic God is quite antithetical to the biblical stories of divine activity."[26]

a. Knowledge of God and knowledge of the self

The location of "knowledge of God" in an extra-mundane context is paralleled by the gnostic understanding of the appropriate environment for that part of the human which is related to the divine. "Knowing God" is integrally related to self-knowledge. Both acts of cognition occur outside the realm of earthly existence. In "The Paraphrase of Shem", for

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example, Shem's experience of being close to the Light occurs during an experience in which his mind has been ecstatically separated from his body:

> My mind which was in my body
> snatched me away from my race.
> It took me up to the top of the
> world, which is close to the
> light that shone upon the
> whole area there. I saw no
> earthly likeness, but there
> was light. And my mind
> separated from the body of
> darkness as though in sleep.
> 27

It is in the midst of this trance that insight into the nature of the self occurs. Seth sees, for the first time, the power of the light and the corresponding darkness into which he, like all humans, has fallen:

> And when he stirred, the
> light of the Spirit appeared
> to him. When he saw it
> he was astonished. He did
> not know that another Power
> was above him. And when
> he saw that his likeness
> was dark compared with the
> Spirit, he felt hurt.
> 28

The anthropology of gnosticism corresponds with the theology in the sense that knowing the self, like knowing God, requires a divorce from the realm of Darkness, the earth. Such a separation reminds us once again of the distinct character of gnosticism derived from its anti-mundane bias. The rhetorical questions of the psalmist in the Hebrew scriptures, "Where could I go to escape from you? Where could I get away from your presence?" [29] reveal a strong immanental dimension in the Hebrew's self-recognition as one whose existence is known by God. To express such an

assertion of self-knowledge through the recognition of divine
knowledge in the midst of earthly existence would be anathema
to the gnostic.

The gnostic perception of self-knowledge also represents
a departure from the Greek concept of the _psyche_. The
absolute split of the true self from earthly existence is
closer to an oriental cast of mind. Hans Jonas argues that
the novelty of gnostic understanding of the self is revealed
by the lack of an indigenous word in the language to describe
an awareness of self dependent upon a separation from the
mundane:

> Obviously the Greek meaning
> of psyche, with all its dignity,
> did not suffice to express the
> new conception of a principle
> transcending all natural and
> cosmic associations that
> adhered to the Greek concept.
> The term _pneuma_ serves in
> Greek Gnosticism generally as
> the equivalent of the expressions
> for the spiritual 'self',
> for which Greek, unlike some
> oriental languages, lacked
> an indigenous word.30

For the gnostic, self-knowledge cannot be achieved by living
with the tension between flesh and spirit. Just as the
eternal principle cannot be found in creation, so, the
individual appreciation of the true self can only happen when
corporeal existence is overcome.

b. Gnosis and salvation

Moving from one realm to another happens through _gnosis_.
This _gnosis_ differs from the "knowledge of God" found in
Biblical theology with regard to context--_gnosis_ in

gnosticism requires a complete abandonment of creation in contrast to Judeo-Christian orthodoxy which affirms the recognition of the goodness of creation as a mark of divine presence--and with regard to function--for Judeo-Christian orthodoxy "knowledge of God" drives the recipient to an ethical response in the midst of earthly existence while gnosticism does not envisage any temporal activity as appropriate to <u>gnosis</u> . Greater similarity between orthodoxy and gnosticism is observed when one examines the way in which <u>gnosis</u> is appropriated by the individual spirit. <u>Gnosis</u>, like "knowledge of God" in orthodox theology, is not acquired solely through intellectual work on the part of the recipient. The blindness implicit in the fallen condition does not permit this in gnostic accounts of salvation. For Judeo-Christian orthodoxy the potential of self-deception implicit in the concept of human sin does not allow for a self-help approach to saving knowledge. In both religious traditions a need exists for external help in the acquisition of knowledge of the divine. This need represents a point of similarity between gnosticism and orthodoxy. Pheme Perkins states:

> In general, Gnostics seem to have
> shared with Christians at large
> the conviction that, however it
> becomes available, some assistance
> from the divine Spirit is required
> for salvation. In many respects,
> then, Gnostics come very close
> to the soteriological language of
> their orthodox counterparts.
> 31

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In "The Hypostasis of the Archons", for example, the knowledge of the "Spirit of Truth" requires a revelation from the "True Man":

> "You, together with your offspring,
> are from the Primeval Father;
> from Above, out of the imperishable
> Light, their souls are come.
> Thus the Authorities cannot
> approach them because of the
> Spirit of Truth present within
> them; and all who have become
> acquainted with this Way exist
> deathless in the midst of
> dying Mankind. Still that
> Sown Element will not become
> known now.
>
> "Instead, after three generations
> it will come to be known, and
> free them from the bondage of
> the Authorities' error."
>
> Then I said, "Sir, how much
> longer?"
>
> He said to me, "Until the moment
> when the True Man, within a
> modelled form, reveals (?) the
> existence of [the Spirit of]
> Truth, which the Father has
> sent.
>
> "Then he will teach them about
> everything: And he will
> annoint them with the unction
> of Life eternal, given him
> from the undominated generation. [32]

The "True Man" of "The Hypostasis of the Archons" is the intermediary who reveals the Spirit of Truth and, thereby, allows the individual to assume the <u>gnosis</u> which will liberate him from the blindness of earthly existence. This theme of a descending revealer is repeated in other gnostic writings. In the Sethian documents a picture is painted of Seth as the "heavenly son of the incorruptible Man, Adamas"

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who is sent into the world to "put on" Jesus as a garment in
order to rescue the elect.[33] Hans Jonas describes a similar
pattern in Valentinianism in which a docetic Jesus is
required in order to give the pneuma captured in human form
information which will allow the possibility of escape:

> The pneuma sojourns in the world
> in order to be pre-formed there
> for the final 'information' through
> the gnosis. This was the secret
> aim which the Mother had in mind
> with the demiurgical creation.
> The gnosis itself is finally
> brought down to a sufficiently
> readied mankind by Jesus unified
> with Christos, descending upon
> the human Jesus at his baptism
> in the Jordan and departing
> from him before his passion
> so that Death was deceived.[34]

This pattern of revelation through a heaven-sent intermediary
does bear a close resemblance to the soteriological role of
Christ proclaimed by orthodox Christianity. It is important
to note, however, that while the need for a revealer is the
same in both orthodox and gnostic literatures, the
incarnational dimension of the Christian notion of Christ as
a mediator of "knowledge of God" is resisted in gnosticism.
As Jonas points out in his description of Valentianian
Christology the union of the Christos with the earthly Jesus
ends before Jesus' death as an indication of the belief that,
"the suffering of the mortal Jesus had no other significance
than that of a stratagem."[35] In gnosticism the revealer who
opens up the possibility of gnosis, like gnosis itself,
cannot be tainted with any hint of accommodation with
creation.

The revelatory component of saving _gnosis_ begins with a "call". Gnostic literature often uses the images of sleep or drunkenness to describe the imprisonment of humanity in the midst of creation. One needs to be called forth from the somnolent state in order be open to the possibility of redeeming _gnosis_. The call is, according to Rudolph, "the simplest representation of the redeemer, its minimal form so to speak."[36] The form of the call can be seen in this passage from "The Concept of Our Great Power":

> Yet you (pl.) are sleeping, dreaming
> dreams. Wake up and return,
> taste and eat the true food!
> Hand out the word and the water
> of life! Cease from the evil
> lusts and desires and (the
> teachings of) the Anomoeans,
> evil heresies that have no basis![37]

Hans Jonas identifies three doctrinal components tied to the call to awake. The recipient of the call is reminded first of his heavenly origin. A promise of redemption follows this reminder of origins. These two parts of the call are summed up in one phrase from "The Gospel of Truth": "Each one's name comes to him. He who is to have knowledge in this manner knows where he comes from and where he is going."[38] The self-knowledge and redemptive parts of the call are followed by "practical _instruction_ as to how to live henceforth in the world, in conformity with the newly won 'knowledge' and in preparation for the eventual ascent!"[39] The practical instruction referred to by Jonas is focused on the need to maintain a conscious distance between a spirit

which has been awakened to its true nature and a world which has the power to corrupt the gnostic spirit. In "The Gospel of Truth" the reader is cautioned about this need for separation from the former life in the world:

> Be concerned with yourselves,
> do not be concerned with other
> things which you have rejected
> from yourselves. Do not
> return to what you have vomited
> to eat it. Do not be moths,
> for you have already cast
> it off. Do not become a
> (dwelling) place for the
> devil, for you have already
> destroyed him. Do not strengthen
> (those who are) obstacles to
> you who are collapsing, as
> though (you were) a support
> (for them). For the unjust
> one is someone to treat ill
> rather than the just one.
> For the former does his works
> as an unjust person; the
> latter as a righteous person
> does his works among others.
> So you, do the will of the
> Father, for you are from him.40

The call, then, arouses the sleeper, speaks of his heavenly origin and a promise of return to that site of wholeness (where "the perfection of the all is in the Father"[41]), and advises him to live in such a way that this knowledge of past and future will not be obscured by earthly existence.

The concepts of a revealer and a call do not lead to the same assertion of human dependence upon divine help found in orthodox Christianity. The revealer and the call are needed to awaken that part of the human creature which, at one time, experienced unity with the Father. However, once awakened, the pneumatic presence within the individual allows a sense of self-sufficiency in its quest for escape from the world

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and return to wholeness. In this regard, John Dart refers to the gnostic as a half-breed. As one encapsulated in a body, outside help is needed to shake off corporeality. On the other hand, as an inheritor of divine light, the gnostic individual also possesses self-actualizing power:

> Man has a nature inherited from
> both the worldly archons and the
> highest light. 'The primary task
> of man in the world is to
> repudiate the archons,' said
> [Orval] Wintermute. Man needs
> power from above to do it, but
> being a half-breed, he is also
> 'the agent of a peculiar justice'
> by denouncing his makers, the archons.
> 42

In his study of "The Treatise on Resurrection", Bentley Layton comments that the Christology of the tractate envisions a Christ who possesses the power to raise himself from death. This possibility of self-resurrection extends to the believer who also has an internal divine power:

> So too, the believer will raise
> himself through his newly
> acquired 'acquaintance'
> with his true self, imparted
> by the Savior's teaching:
> Paul by contrast has God
> raising Jesus; but the first
> principle of our author's
> theology is too far removed
> from the mundane realm for
> such aggressive intervention.
> 43

c. The anti-institutional bias of the gnostic
     understanding of gnosis

Through gnosis, the individual acquires a self-sufficiency with regard to salvation which would be foreign to orthodox Christianity. In her study on gnosticism, Elaine Pagels points to this spiritual independence in the gnostic

as one of the most significant issues over which gnosticism
and orthodoxy parted company. Pagels characterizes the gulf
between the two in the following discussion of Valentinus'
theology:

> For orthodox Christians insisted
> that humanity needs a way beyond
> its own power--a divinely given
> way--to approach God. And this,
> they declared, the catholic church
> offered to those who would be lost
> without it.......The gnostic
> Valentinus taught that humanity
> itself manifests the divine
> life and divine revelation.
> The church, he says, consists
> of that portion of humanity
> that recognizes and celebrates
> its divine origin. But Valentinus
> did not use the term in its
> contemporary sense, to refer to
> the human race taken collectively.
> Instead, he and his followers
> thought of <u>anthropos</u> (here
> translated 'humanity') as the
> under-lying nature of that
> collective entity, the archetype,
> or spiritual essence, of human being.
> <div align="right">44</div>

Pagels argues that this divine possibility within the human

was one of the most threatening notions within gnosticism

insofar as the catholic church was concerned. The church's

rejection of gnosticism was prompted, according to Pagels, by

the anti-institutional bias implied in a doctrine which

entertains the possibility of redemption without external

aids. Orthodox Christians, convinced of their inability to

save themselves, would need the outside help represented on

earth by the church. Gnostics without such an assumption

regarding human limitation would not have the same ties to an

institution claiming to be the earthly representative of an

essential saving power. Pagels claims that "only by

suppressing gnosticism did orthodox leaders establish that
system of organization which united all believers into a
single institutional structure."[45]

B. The Role of Knowledge in Davies' Novels

i. Similarity and dissimilarity with the gnostic conception of gnosis

In Chapter Three the important distinction between
Davies' invocation of a gnostic spirit in his novels and the
content of ancient gnostic texts was made with regard to
their respective attitudes toward the world. Davies does not
exhibit the radical anti-mundane bias of the early gnostics.
However, the dynamic of moving from one repressive
environment to a place in which wholeness of self is possible
is a part of the ethos of Davies' world.

A similar distinction needs to made regarding the way in
which Davies perceives knowledge. Knowledge, for Davies, is
not divorced from the created order. Indeed, Davies exhibits
respect for knowledge gained from the experience of living.
In A Mixture of Frailties, for example, he contrasts Eros and
Thanatos people, identifying his protagonist, Sir Benedict
Domdaniel, with those who are for life:

> There are, the world over, only
> two important political parties
> --the people who are for life,
> and the people who are against
> it......You know about Eros
> and Thanatos?.....I'm an Eros
> man myself.....But there are
> Thanatosses everywhere--the
> Permanent Opposition. The very
> worst Thanatosses are those who
> pretend to be Eros men; you
> can sometimes spot them

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> because they blather about
> the purpose of art being to
> lift people up out of the
> mire, and refine them and make
> them use lace hankies--to
> castrate them, in fact.
> 46

Art, which, for Davies, is one of the important ways in which

knowledge about the world and the self is imparted, does not

exist in an esoteric realm divorced from the "mire" of human

existence. (This theme is central to the novel, What's Bred

in the Bone.) The experiences of life in this world are

integral to the acquisition of knowledge about God and the

self. In this respect, Davies does not share the gnostic's

need for spiritual separation from the earth in order to

know.

What Davies does share with the gnostics is the dynamic

of gnosis as central to the realization of wholeness whether

that be expressed in the gnostic phrase, "the perfection of

the all", or in Davies' notion of possessing "it [life] as a

whole."⁴⁷ Movement from the captivity of the mundane to the

perfection of the supra-mundane in gnosticism and movement

from a place of repressed self-awareness to a place of

realized self-understanding in Davies' novels both require

the same ingredient--gnosis.

Davies also shares with gnosticism a resistance to the

Hebraic emphasis on the relationship between "knowing God"

and the concept of righteousness in both the divine and human

sphere. In World of Wonders, Dunstan Ramsay reflects upon

the definition of God found in the Westminister Confession.

He places particular emphasis on the adjectives related to

God's righteousness: "'Most loving, most gracious, merciful, longsuffering, abundant in goodness.......'" Ramsay has, in his lifetime, attempted to seek God through his study of saints--earthly creatures who manifest divine attributes. He concludes, however, that "all I had found in that lifelong study was a complexity that brought God no nearer."[48] Just as the gnostic does not perceive God in the midst of a corrupt world, so knowledge of God does not, in Davies' novels, evolve from a manifestation of righteous acts in the world. Righteous acts are not the vehicle which bring about knowledge of God or the self. Similarly, what is commonly called goodness in human existence is not a sign of the possession of such knowledge on the part of humanity. Indeed, goodness is portrayed as a sign of ignorance. "And what is this goodness? A squalid, know-nothing acceptance of things as they are, an operatic version of the dream which, in North America, means Mom and apple pie."[49] The ethical dynamic in the Hebraic definition of knowledge is rejected by Davies' characters in favour of an approach closer to the gnostic emphasis on an inner spiritual drama as the appropriate context for gnosis.

ii. The location of saving knowledge in the inner self

Central to the gnostic understanding of gnosis is the sense that saving knowledge in the earthly sphere is located in the inner self. As Jonas reminds us, "The goal of gnostic striving is the release of the 'inner man' from the bonds of the world and his return to his native realm of light. The necessary condition for this is that he knows about the

transmundane God and about himself." While Davies does not

share the anti-mundane bias implicit in this statement, he

does agree that the deepest form of knowledge--the knowledge

which has the power to transform life--is to be found in an

internal rather than external realm. Toward the end of the

novel, The Manticore, David Staunton writes in his diary of

his family's housekeeper, Netty. He perceives Netty's

understanding of the world to be thoroughly objective:

> Thinking of Netty puts me in mind
> of Pargetter's warning about the
> witnesses, or clients, whose creed
> is esse in re; to such people
> the world is absolutely clear because
> they cannot understand that our
> personal point of view colours
> what we perceive; they think
> everything seems exactly the same
> to everyone as it does to themselves.
> After all, they say, the world is
> utterly objective; it is plain
> before our eyes; therefore what
> the ordinary intelligent man
> (this is always themselves) sees
> is all there is to be seen,
> and anyone who sees differently
> is mad, or malign, or just
> plain stupid.

This simple objectivity is rejected by David. His mentor,

Pargetter, observes that David has preferred to view the

world in relation to ideas. In an Aristotelean manner, David

sees reality as intellectually logical theories into which

experience fits:

> Pargetter rebuked me for being
> an equally [with Netty] wrong-
> headed, though more complex
> and amusing creature, whose
> creed is esse in intellectu
> solo. 'You think the world
> is your idea,' he said one
> November day at a tutorial

when I had been offering him
                    some fancy theorizing, 'and
                    if you don't understand that
                    and check it for now it will
                    make your whole life a giant
                    hallucination.'
                              52

For Davies, both of these epistemological positions are

unacceptable. Just as the gnostics were uncomfortable with

definitions of knowledge which were tied to the world either

through relationship to concrete activity as in the Hebrew

world view or through the Platonic notion of forms existing

behind sense-perceived reality, Davies exhibits, through his

characters, a resistance to tying the most important form of

knowledge to the things perceived by the senses. While

Davies may not share the radical anti-mundane bias of the

gnostics in the sense that the quest for knowledge undertaken

by his characters is influenced by the mire of existence, he

does come close to the gnostic's sense that the focal point

for saving gnosis is to be found in the interior life of the

individual rather than in the externally perceived world.

Having rejected esse in re and esse in intellectu solo, David

Staunton explores a new possibility which will come closer to

Davies' desire for an interior locum as the ground of

knowing:

                    But what am I headed for?
                    Where has Dr. Johanna been
                    taking me? I suspect toward
                    a new ground of belief that
                    wouldn't have occurred to
                    Pargetter, which might be
                    called esse in anima:
                    I am beginning to recognize
                    the objectivity of the world,
                    while knowing also that because
                    I am who and what I am, I
                    both perceive the world in

terms of who and what I am
                    and project onto the world
                    a great deal of who and what
                    I am. If I know this, I
                    ought to be able to escape
                    the stupider kinds of illusion.
                    The absolute nature of
                    things is independent of my
                    senses (which are all I
                    have to perceive with), and
                    what I perceive is an image
                    in my own psyche.

                    All very fine. Not too
                    hard to formulate and
                    accept intellectually.
                    But to know it; to
                    bring it into daily life
                    --that's the problem.
                    And it would be real
                    humility, not just the
                    mock-modesty that generally
                    passes for humility.
                                        53

For Davies, knowledge of God is to be found in the knowledge

of self. The egoism of Davies' approach to knowledge is

reminiscent of the gnostic desire to see the appropriate

receptacle for gnosis located in the inner life of the

individual rather than in community or institution. James

Neufeld comments on this epistemological bias toward the

individual in Davies' novels when he says:

                    But the most important value which
                    the trilogy asserts is expressed
                    through the concept of egoism. Only
                    through a genuinely humble awareness
                    of the importance of the self can
                    the individual reconcile the
                    conflicting claims of subjectivity
                    and objectivity and achieve the
                    kind of wholeness implied by David
                    Staunton's esse in anima.
                                        54

The individual is the stage upon which the quest for

knowledge is acted out. In gnostic literature the drama

follows a pattern which includes a call to awaken from the

sleep of ignorance which is earthly existence. The call
includes, a reminder of heavenly origin, a promise of
redemption and practical instruction. This same pattern can
been seen in the journey of the individual spirit in Davies'
novels.

iii. The revealing of knowledge

In the Deptford trilogy, each central character is
awakened from the dreary, repressive environment induced by
the puritan small town. In each of the three books this
awakening is initiated by a revealer from outside the sphere
of Deptford society. In Fifth Business, Mary Dempster is the
"saint" who opens up to Dunstable Ramsay the possibility of a
world of esoteric knowledge hitherto unknown. Ramsay
describes his relationship with Mary as "my first encounter
with a particular kind of reality, which my religion, my
upbringing, and the callowly romantic cast of my mind had
declared obscene. Therefore there was an aspect of Mary
Dempster which was outside my ken...."[55] David Staunton, on
the eve of his encounter with Jo von Haller in The Manticore,
has a dream in which he encounters a gypsy woman who speaks
an incomprehensible language. The significance of the woman
in the dream is revealed when David says to his female
Jungian analyst, "If I understand the dream, I cannot make
head nor tale of the gypsy woman with the incomprehensible
conversation, and go back to my familiar world." Von Haller
responds: "Your state of mind at present is very much that
of a man who wants no conversation with incomprehensible
women. But your state of mind may change."[56] As David's

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story unfolds, it is, indeed, women, speaking language quite

remote from the rational discourse of the Canadian court

room, who open up the possiblity of self-discovery. For Paul

Dempster, it is the Mephistophelian character, Willard, who

opens up the possibility of the alternative world of the

circus. When Paul first sees the conjurer he uses the

biblical imagery of his parsonage upbringing to describe one

who would transport him to a world beyond the boundaries of

that same ministerial home:

> But Willard! For me the Book
> of Revelation came alive: here
> was an angel come down from
> heaven, having great power,
> and the earth was lightened
> with his glory; if only I
> could be like him, surely
> there would be no more sorrow,
> nor crying, nor any more pain,
> and all former things--my
> dark home, my mad, disgraceful
> mother, the torment of school--
> would pass away. 57

These initial revealers are followed by others such as Padre

Blazon in Fifth Business and Sir John and Milady in World of

Wonders. The revealer motif in each novel converges in the

person of Liesel. It is Liesel who leads Ramsay to a self-

identity characterized by the notion of Fifth Business, David

Staunton to his second birth in the Swiss cave and Eisengrim

to an articulation of the Magian world view as the central

theme in his life.

The awakening moments in the lives of the protagonists

of the Deptford trilogy bring forth the reminder of origins

so central to self-understanding in a gnostic world view.

Neufeld identifies this concern for origins as a stable point

Neufeld identifies this concern for origins as a stable point
of reference in the trilogy which, along with Davies'
consistent identification of the inner self as the proper
sphere for saving knowledge, prevents the novels from being
based on a "hopeless relativity." Throughout Davies' work
there is a steady emphasis on "the importance of the past as
a shaping influence on the present and the future."[58] This
"past" is not one which consists only of a recollection of
concrete events in a personal or corporate history. It
consists, rather, of those events as they are shaped and
informed by mythic patterns of (in Jungian language) the
collective unconscious. Like the gnostic stories of a
corrupt creation, the myths which surround the origins of
Davies' characters are intended to illumine the present
circumstances of humanity and allude to a possible future.
Ramsay, when talking about his commitment to hagiography,
describes his rationale in these words:

> I clung to my notion, ill
> defined though it was, that
> a serious study of any
> important body of human
> knowledge, or theory, or
> belief, if undertaken with
> a critical but not a cruel
> mind, would in the end yield
> some secret, some valuable
> insight, into the nature
> of life and the true end
> of man.[59]

The object of this serious study is expressed in several
ways. It is sometimes characterized by ideas or systems of
belief which have become so ingrained in a people that they
are possessed by individuals in an almost unconscious manner.

One of the most common phrases used by Davies to describe
this phenomenon is found in this description of Monica in <u>A</u>
<u>Mixture</u> <u>of</u> <u>Frailties</u>:

> Christian myth and Christian
> morality were part of the
> fabric of her life, dimly
> apprehended and taken for
> granted behind the externals
> of belief. And it is what is
> taken for granted in our homes,
> rather than what we are painstakingly
> taught, which supplies the bones
> of our faith.60

Throughout Davies' fiction it is the discovery of mythic
patterns which places the protagonist on the path toward a
knowledge of "the nature of life and the true end of man".
In <u>Fifth</u> <u>Business</u>, for example, the revealer, Liesl, takes
the notion of "fifth business" from opera and uses it as a
label for a necessary role in the human drama amd which finds
expression in the particularity of Ramsay's life. This
concept of a pattern recurring in different human stories is
re-iterated later in the novel when Ramsay describes to Padre
Blazon his cracking of Liesl's nose. Blazon immediately
identifies Ramsay's re-enactment of a human scene which is a
thousand years old: "'Oho, Ramezay, no wonder you write so
well of myth and legend! It was St. Dunstan seizing the
Devil's snout in his tongs, a thousand years after his
time." 61   Just as the gnostic revealer brings to
consciousness a pattern of being before the time of mundane
captivity, so Davies' revealers awaken a knowledge of mythic
patterns which are bred into the bones of his characters.

The recognition of where one fits "into poetry and
myth"⁶² --the connecting of one's life story with recurring
human story patterns--is the first step on the road to a
self-knowledge which has the power to redeem one from the
restraints of the world of small town protestantism.
Following his identification of Ramsay's physical encounter
with Liesl with the mythic story of St. Dunstan and the
devil, Padre Blazon declares that Ramsay is ready for the
heroic life. The heroic life is characterized by the self-
knowledge to be had in the recognition and acceptance of
one's shadow side:

> You met the Devil as an equal,
> not cringing or frightened or
> begging for a trashy favour.
> That is the heroic life,
> Ramezay. You are fit to
> be the Devil's friend, without
> any fear of losing yourself
> to Him!
> ⁶³

The theme of origins is seen in The Manticore in the
climactic encounter between David and Liesl in the cave.
When Liesl describes the bear worship which occurred in the
cave, David expresses the view that such ancient practices do
not mean much to him. This disinterest in ancestral patterns
of worship is, for Liesl, an indication of the long journey
which, in spite of intensive Jungian analysis, still lies
before David if he is to achieve self-knowledge. Liesl
counters David's disinterest by saying, "You don't know
enough for it to mean anything to you. Worse for you, you
don't feel enough for it to mean anything to you."⁶⁴
Knowledge of and a sense of identification with the stories

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don't feel enough for it to mean anything to you."[64]
Knowledge of and a sense of identification with the stories

of the ancestors is, for Davies, an essential part of the
journey toward self-knowledge.

As seen in <u>Fifth Business</u>, the awakening prompted by the
presence of a revealer can lead to a promise of redemption
exemplified by the heroic life. Liesl contrasts the heroic
life to be had in the inner journey toward <u>gnosis</u> with the
contemporary preoccupation with what she calls the "anti-hero
and the "mini-soul":

> But just because you [David] are
> not a roaring egoist, you needn't
> fall for the fashionable modern
> twaddle of the anti-hero and the
> mini-soul. That is what we might
> call the Shadow of democracy;
> it makes it so laudable, so cosy
> and right and easy to be a
> spiritual runt and lean on all
> the other runts for support and
> applause in a splendid apotheosis
> runtdom. Thinking runts, of
> course--oh, yes, thinking away
> as hard as a runt can without
> getting into danger. But there are
> heroes, still. The modern hero
> is the man who conquers in the
> inner struggle. How do you know
> you aren't that kind of hero?
>   65

Davies, like the gnostics, locates the most important human
journey in the context of the inner self. His characters are
dependent upon revealers who have the capacity to bring to
consciousness an essence of the self which has been obscured
by a repressive culture. This awakening is followed by the
possibility of a kind of heroism which is marked by conquest
not in the machinations of world history but, rather, in the
ability to know oneself.

iv. Davies' anti-institutional bias

Elaine Pagels argues that the conflict between orthodoxy and gnosticism in the early church was "between those restless, inquiring people who marked out a solitary path of self-discovery and the institutional framework that gave to the great majority of people religious sanction and ethical direction for their daily lives."[66]   In Davies' attraction to an understanding of knowledge characterized by an inner awakening and an individual heroic journey of the human spirit, we experience a similar resistance to institutions and a corporate approach to human learning. Stephen Bonnycastle, in his article, "Robertson Davies and the Ethics of Monologue," makes this point when he asserts:

> These novels set themselves
> against social institutions,
> and individuals find the
> answers to their problems
> by escaping from society..
> ....The religion of these
> novels proposes a new ideal,
> something primitive and sublime,
> in which society and its
> institutions are insignificant,
> and dialogue and the reasoning
> powers of the mind are eliminated.[67]

The focus of an anti-institutional bias in Davies' writing is directed toward the systems of the modern liberal education. At best, Davies views formal schooling as necessary for those without the intellectual and spiritual resources for the inner journey. In World of Wonders, Eisengrim expresses this point of view when he speaks of the advantage he had in being denied much formal education:

> I suppose the greatest advantage
> I have had over other people who
> have wanted to do what I can do
> is that I really had no education
> at all, and am free of the illusions
> and commonplace values that education
> brings. I don't speak against
> education, for most people it is
> a necessity; but if you're going
> to be a genius you should try
> either to avoid education entirely,
> or else work hard to get rid of
> any you've been given. Education
> is for commonplace people and it
> fortifies their commonplaceness.
> Makes them useful, of course, in
> an ordinary sort of way.
>
> 68

Contemporary liberal education relies on the notion of the

desirability of common values and common goals in the

community it serves. The institution of orthodoxy by the

church assumes the same possibility. The radical

individualism implied in an epistemology which centers the

journey toward knowledge in the inner self and which views

community ideologies--whether they be the redemptive

possibilities implicit in creation and the earthly church as

expounded by Christian orthodoxy or the "commonplaceness" of

contemporary liberal education--as barriers to truth which

must be overcome. In both gnosticism and in Davies' approach

to knowledge a strong aristocratic spirit is found which

resists communal values. Bonnycastle describes this spirit

when he contrasts Northrop Frye's definition of a liberal

education with Davies' individualistic bias:

> Northrop Frye echoes these words
> [of Matthew Arnold] when he says,
> "The ethical purpose of a liberal
> education is to liberate, which
> can only mean to make one capable
> of conceiving society as free,

> classless and urbane." The
> Magian trilogy sets itself against
> these ideals in an uncompromising
> and clear-eyed way, and promotes
> a fierce aristocracy of the spirit.
> 69

This individualistic bias with regard to education is

accompanied by an anti-rational bias. Davies' characters

perceive contemporary education to be an assault on the

intuitive and imaginative dimension of human knowing. In

World of Wonders Liesl proclaims that "we have educated

ourselves into a world from which wonder, and the fear and

dread and splendour and freedom from wonder have been

banished." 70 The style of education which has banished

wonder is characterized by Davies' vocabulary of a science

which is technological rather than imaginative. In Bred in

the Bone Father Darcourt, speaking in the context of a modern

Canadian university, gives an image of a pedestrian sort of

science which he believes shapes the dominant vocabulary of

the culture:

> Well science is the theology
> of our time, and like the old
> theology it's a muddle of
> conflicting assertions. What
> gripes my gut is that it
> has such a miserable
> vocabulary.....It's the
> most overweening, pompous
> priesthood mankind has
> ever endured in all its
> recorded history, and its
> lack of symbol and metaphor
> and its zeal for abstraction
> drive mankind to a barren
> land of starved imagination.
> 71

Davies uses the term "science" to define the theology of our

era. A more appropriate term might be technology (the word

used by George Grant to define the dominant ethos of

contemporary North American culture) since, in other places in his writing, Davies includes scientists in his collection of those who stand over against the common culture in their imaginative quest for true knowledge. In The Rebel Angels, for example, Darcourt includes the scientist when he asserts: "I had become convinced, in some words Einstein was fond of, that the serious research scholar in our generally materialistic age is the only deeply religious human being."[72]

The poverty of imagination found in the language of modern technology is, for Davies, symbolic of a dominant culture which prizes an understanding of knowledge as a rational commodity which can be imparted in an institutional setting over against a more intuitive sense of knowledge which relies on an individual's grasp of the inner self. The pejorative description of the language of the "theology of our time" is paralleled by Davies' dislike of a systematic approach to learning. In an earlier novel, Tempost-Tost, Davies' character, Humphrey Cobbler, speaks of the difference between Ornamental and Useful Knowledge. One definition of knowledge relies on a rational system while the other is ecclectic and resists external structure:

> You are an advocate of Useful
> Knowledge.......Well, allow me to
> introduce myself to you as an
> advocate of Ornamental Knowledge.
> You like the mind to be a neat
> machine, equipped to work
> efficiently, if narrowly, and
> with no extra bits or useless
> parts. I like the mind to be
> a dustbin of scraps of brilliant

> fabric, odd gems, worthless but
> fascinating curiosities, tinsel,
> quaint bits of carving, and a
> reasonable amount of healthy
> dirt. Shake the machine and
> it goes out of order; shake
> the dustbin and it adjusts
> itself beautifully to its new
> position.
>   73

This attraction to the dustbin over against the machine

betrays a strong anti-technological bent. This bent is also

characterized by a promotion of the value of feeling in a

world too oriented to mechanistic thinking. In A Mixture of

Frailties, Monica Gall, sitting in the church, discovers:

> Here was feeling, and feeling was
> reality. If only life could be
> lived in terms of those windows,
> of that aspiring, but not
> frightening, screen! If only
> things and feelings existed, and
> thoughts and judgements did not
> have to trouble and torture.
>   74

Monica's experience in the church is set in the context of a

world which always seems to be demanding a cold rationalism.

Monica protests against this world in favour of her feelings:

"Must one live always by balancing fact against fact? Had

the irrational side of life no right to be lived."   This

emphasis on the emotive dimension of human knowing in the

midst of a world which only wants cold reason is developed

further in World of Wonders in the story of the English

theatre company touring Canada. The theatre group

specializes in old-fashioned romance. They are travelling in

a land populated by the "descendants of hard-bitten

pioneers" who lacked "an aesthetic sense."   The vision of

the world presented by the theatre company is perceived to be

quite removed from the day to day lives of the audience. One

of the marks of this distance between the play and the

audience is the theatre company's emphasis on feelings:

> Sir John's theatre didn't deal
> in ideas, but in feelings.
> Chivalry and loyalty and selfless
> love don't rank as ideas, but
> it was wonderful how they
> seized on our audiences;
> they loved such things,
> even if they had no intention
> of trying them out in their
> own lives.
> 77

The conflict between the thinking and feeling dimensions

of the human personality receives its most intensive

treatment in The Manticore. David Staunton's experience of

Jungian analysis raises the question of feeling as a mode of

self-knowledge. David is portrayed as a rational lawyer who

has, in an extreme manner, repressed the feeling side of his

being. Peter Brigg describes David's character:

> David's reaction to being
> judged and governed by a most
> irrational and capricious
> father is to seek the heights
> of the great stone mountain
> of the tablets of law and
> precedence, where he can
> exist in the clear air of
> reason, formality and
> tradition, free of the
> mists of paternal emotion
> and caprice.
> 78

In her treatme of David, Jo von Haller emphasizes the role

played by feeling in one's journey to know oneself. Being

able to understand and to describe pales in comparison to the

ability to feel. If the inner journey represents the

appropriate path to redemptive knowledge, the mood which

accompanies one on the journey is one of feeling. The

exaltation of feeling over understanding is seen in von

Haller's declaration that David, who can think but not feel,

is stupid. His learning and his ability to reason will not

lead him toward self-knowledge. Only feeling can accomplish

that task. "Understanding and experiencing are not

interchangeable. Any theologian understands martyrdom, but

only the martyr experiences the fire."[79] Patricia Monk, in

her study on Davies' use of Jung in his writing, comments

that this emphasis on feeling in The Manticore is not seen

only from the perspective of psychology. A sense of

psychological wholeness does require the openness to the

feeling side of one's being. However, an understanding of

self-knowledge which entertains the possibility of a heroic

denouement to the journey--a sense of meaning and fulfillment

to be achieved as a result of knowing oneself--implies a

spiritual as well as psychological dimension to the emphasis

on feeling:

> Dr. von Haller can educate
> David to allow himself to
> feel and to understand his
> feeling, but she cannot
> educate him to feel.....
> ...The only way that he
> can really learn to feel
> is to be so overwhelmed
> by an emotion that he is
> willing to abandon thought
> and common sense altogether
> and trust his feeling
> as a mode of functioning.
> What he needs for this is
> something quite other
> than common sense--a sense
> of the numinous.[80]

Knowledge about the emotions can be imparted. The emotions

themselves can only be experienced. When an understanding of knowledge exhibits a bias towards feeling over rationality, the possibility of systematizing what we know becomes exceedingly difficult. Institutions such as the church and the school deal in systems of thought which can be ordered and communicated. Feeling--the shadow of our thinking selves--cannot be conveyed in any systematic way by institutions. Their reality comes only through the personal experience of the inner self. An understanding of knowledge which stresses feeling is consistent with the individualistic bias in Davies' novels.

This individualism does not, however, imply that one is on one's own in the quest for gnosis. Even in something as personal as feeling knowledge, outside help is possible. In both the literature of the ancient gnostics and in Davies' novels, the assistance of external revealers and mythic patterns proves indispensible.

V.   THE HELPERS: REVEALERS

AND MYTHIC PATTERNS

V. The Helpers: Revealers and Mythic Patterns

Roberston Davies exhibits an affinity to the gnostic spirit in his characters' desire to escape from a one-dimensional world in which the shadow side of existence is denied to a world in which spiritual adventures and self-knowledge are possible. This affinity is strengthened in Davies' adoption of the gnostic attraction to _gnosis_ as the primary vehicle for escape. _Gnosis_, for both Davies and the ancient gnostics, is to be discovered internally. The spark of divinity which has been covered over by the ignorance engendered by earthly existence (or by the existence of a repressive culture as in Davies' imaging of the gnostic story) is discovered by the individual. The spark of divinity is not imparted by institutional authority.

The egoism implied in the above description and the corresponding suspicion of human institutions and communities could lead to the assumption that the escape from ignorance and the journey to self-discovery are solitary endeavours. While it is true that the mediations of church or school do not play an essential role in either ancient gnosticism or in Davies' novels, there are individual helpers who become strategic in the drama of self-discovery. While it is true that orthodox doctrine does not order the journey of either the gnostic or Davies' protagonists, there are metaphors which illumine the journey.

A. The Gnostic Revealer

The most obvious example of the individual helpers in the progress of the soul toward _gnosis_ is to be found in the

notion of the external revealer. The revealer is the one who issues the call and, thereby, begins the awakening process. The revealer of gnosticism bears a resemblance to the redeemer role played by Jesus in the Christian story. Indeed, Christ often fulfills the role of redeemer in the Christianized gnostic tracts. Kurt Rudolph, however, makes the point that the gnostic understanding of the redeemer bears some characteristics which distinguish it from the Christian:

> In the area of Christian Gnosis
> the idea [of the redeemer] is
> certainly to be found, but it is
> only one form and not the
> normative one. Preponderant
> in Gnosis are quite other
> conceptions, which are clearly
> distinct from the Christian and
> therefore cannot derive from
> Christianity.......The ancient
> idea of the "redeemer" corresponds
> more to the concept of "liberator"
> or "deliverer", and this
> actually fits the gnostic
> "redeemer"-figures also. They
> are those who for the first
> time show to men in general
> the way to liberation from the
> cosmos. One may call them just
> as well revealers or emissaries
> or messengers, who at the command
> of the supreme God impart the
> saving message of the
> redeeming knowledge. Since,
> however, this is beyond doubt
> an act of redemption, they
> can also with justice be
> described as "redeemers"
> (some of them indeed are
> active as "helpers" in the
> accomplishment of the ascent
> of the soul).
> 1

The variety of titles--redeemer, revealer, liberator, deliverer and helper--suggested by Rudolf is matched by a variety of mythic and historic figures who undertake this role in the gnostic literature. Gnosticism does not adhere to a single, indispensable redeemer figure as is the case in orthodox Christianity. Rudolf reminds us that "the various schools and writings have different views about the figures and the form of the redeemer or emissary of light.[2]

1. The variety of revealer figures

An examination of gnostic literature reveals the richness of the variety of figures assigned to help in the calling and awakening process. In "The Apocalyse of Adam", for example, Eve plays the role of a revealer-helper to Adam who, in turn, plays the same role with his son, Seth:

> 'Listen to my words, my son
> Seth. When God had created
> me out of the earth along with
> Eve your mother, I went about
> with her in a glory which she
> had seen in the aeon from
> which we had come forth.
> She taught me a word of
> knowledge of the eternal
> God......Now then, my son
> Seth, I will reveal to you
> the things which those men
> whom I saw before me at first
> revealed to me...[3]

In other gnostic tractates, the revealer comes in the form of a heavenly being. In "The Paraphrase of Shem", the voice of Derdekeas comes to Shem in the context of an ecstatic trance:

> I heard a voice saying to me,
> Shem, since you are from an
> unmixed power and you are the
> first being upon the earth,
> hear and understand what I

shall say to you first
concerning the great Powers
who were in existence in
the beginning, before I
appeared.
4

Derdekeas descends from his position close to the Light and

goes to Hades in order "to rescue the fallen and entrapped

light of the Spirit and of the mind of Darkness."[5]

Along side the Biblical characters such as Adam, Seth,

Baruch and Melchizedek and mythic occupants of Heaven such as

Derdekeas, there also exist in some later gnostic writings

historic figures such as Simon Magus and Zoroaster who play

the role of the redeemer/revealer/helper. The variety of

figures, mythic and historic, to play this role is emphasized

in Rudolph's reminder that " the gnostic religious founder

Mani accepted a great number of Old Testament personalities

into the chain of the revealers or 'apostles of light', but

also Zoroaster, Buddha and Jesus."[6]

ii. The role of the revealer

Whatever the name given to the revealer, the role is

critical in the process which will enable the hearer to

escape captivity in the world and, through gnosis, approach

the realm of the Light. The fallenness of everything

connected with creation only serves to emphasize the

importance of the revealer. Because the immediate

environment of the hearer is radically frought with

ignorance, the only way in which he or she can be exposed to

the realm of the Light is to be told of it. It cannot be

experienced in the day to day events of human history. Pheme

Perkins comments:

> Typically for Gnostic apocalypses,
> the visionary element is missing
> throughout. The seer learns or
> hears about different waters and
> types of soul in the heavenly
> region. He does not see them
> and then seek interpretation
> as a Jewish visionary would do.[7]

The revealer's task, therefore, is removed from the

machinations of human history. The images of escape and

return are other-worldly and cannot be found in any image of

creation. They must be described in words. Without the

revealer's word pictures, the hearer would have no contact

with that from which he has descended.

B. Davies' Revealers

The prosaic small towns of Davies' world are, like the

vision of creation articulated by the gnostics, devoid of

overt manifestations of an alternate vision to that which

exists. When Dunstan Ramsay discovers The Secrets of Stage

Conjuring by Robert-Houdin hidden away in the local Deptford

library, he discovers a world of magic hitherto unknown. The

discovery arises from reading and not from any experience of

living in Deptford:

> When he [Robert-Houdin] insisted
> on the necessity of things that
> were unknown to Deptford, I
> assumed that it was because
> Deptford was a village and
> Paris was a great and
> sophisticated capital....[8]

In order to discover the things "unknown to Deptford" Davies'

protagonists need the assistance of those who are not bound

by the village. Just as the earth-bound soul of the gnostic

imagination needs to be called and awakened by a revealer, so

Davies' characters need to hear from someone from the outside. Davies' didactic style of writing re-enforces the conviction that the knowledge of alternate visions is sparked by the external revealer rather than by existential experience.

i. The variety of revealers in Davies' narrative

The revealers in Davies' stories take various forms. Teachers, priests, psychoanalysts and magicians are all called upon to perform this function. The common bond among the revealers is their knowledge of something outside the village. This knowledge comes not only from a life lived in a different place but, also and more particularly, from a relationship with mythic patterns which have been forgotten in the small town environment. The revealers may have historic roots but their real significance lies in their connection with mythology. Terry Goldie comments that Ramsay's interest in saints in Fifth Business is an indication of the importance which Davies attaches to these mythic figures:

> In Fifth Business, Dunstan's
> main interest is hagiography,
> or the study of saints. He does
> not limit himself to the
> perusal of dry documents of
> fact, but instead is often
> drawn more to those saints'
> legends which seem to have
> least historical substance,
> such as that of St. Uncumcher,
> the woman who grew a beard
> to protect her Christian
> chastity......Ramsay comes
> to recognize that the validity
> of legends is found not in
> their historical accuracy

but in the role they play
                         in the folklore, the guiding
                         myths, of society.[9]

The revealers of Davies' novels have a connection with a

mythic universe in which patterns which transcend the

particularities of time and space can be found. Davies is

attracted to Jung's notion that in folklore "the movements of

the psyche can be understood as general human processes more

easily in it than in individual case histories."[10] Patricia

Monk, in her study on Davies and Jung goes on to say that

"for Davies it [folklore] has more general value as an

extension of ourselves as human beings."[11]

     In the same manner that the gnostic writers adopted

mythic characters such as Adam, Seth and Derdekeas to play

the role of revealer in their dramas, Davies makes extensive

use of mythic images in the character development of his

revealers. In the Deptford trilogy, for example, the

character of Liesl adopts a last name which comes from a play

upon which Goethe based his poem, Faust. Vitzliputzli is

described as one of the lesser demons who served the great

musician. Gertrude Lewis, in an article entitled

"Vitzliputzi Revisited," points out that Davies' use of the

name extends beyond the explanation given by Liesl. The name

can also be attributed to an Aztec god who devours human

beings. Ramsay and Liesl first meet in Mexico. As well, the

name is used in Europe to give a colloquial label to a

"small, mischievous but endearing figure."[12] Lewis concludes

her study by commenting that Davies' "allusions [in the use

of the name] comprise the mythological, philological and

colloquial aspects of Vitziliputzli and are united in one of
his great character studies."[13]   This name with several

reference points serves as an indication of Davies' desire to

connect his revealers--those who tell the hearer of an

alternative vision--to a body of mythology which is

personified in the revealer but which also transcends the

particular.

This pattern of attaching the revealer figures in the

novels to mythic characters, as seen in the case of Liesl, is

repeated as the characters for whom Liesl acts as a revealer

become, in turn, revealers themselves. The connection

between Ramsay's adopted name of Dunstan and St. Dunstan (a

connection discussed in Chapter One) is related to Ramsay's

role as a conveyor of knowledge about the world beyond

Deptford. Those qualities attributed to St. Dunstan are the

ones which enable Ramsay to play out his role as a revealer.

Wilfred Cude in his article, "Historiography and Those Damned

Saints: Shadow and Light in Fifth Business, comments:

> Ramsay, whom Father Blazon
> proclaims as "St. Dunstan..
> ..., a thousand years after
> his time,' (223) has the
> essential qualities of his
> medieval predecessor: birth
> in the distant Celtic west
> of the English imperium, an
> infatuation with magic,
> unquestioned heroism, a
> dedication to the lives of
> the saints, good works, a
> productive scholarly career,
> and participation in three
> miracles.[14]

With these attributes symbolized by the connection with St.

Dunstan, Ramsay is able to take on the role of a revealer
enabling, in particular, the reader of Davies' novels to
contemplate the possibility of liberating self-discovery.

a. The magus as revealer

Davies' revealers take different forms in each of his
novels. The most frequent persona adopted by the revealer in
his stories is that of the magus. The magus, as a mythic
figure, is characterized by wisdom and wizardry. The magus
also exhibits a dark side to his or her personality. In
psychological terms, the magus is individuated to the extent
that there is an awareness of both darkness and light,
outward reality and shadow. This description is consistent
with the picture of the revealer in gnostic mythology. The
revealer is the one who bridges the gap between darkness and
light. In "The Paraphrase of Shem", for example, the
revealer, Derdekeas, descends from the light to rescue the
entrapped light in creation. In order to accomplish his task
"he puts on 'the beast', apparently the body, and in that
disguise he advances the cosmic work of salvation."[15]
The magus figure in Davies' narrative, like the figure of
Derdekeas, takes on the role of the dark figure in order to
achieve the goal of self-knowledge.

The importance of the magus can be seen in the Deptford
trilogy. Peter Baltensperger in his article, "Battles with
the Trolls," suggests that, in Fifth Business, the role of
the magus is combined with the role of hero in the person of
Dunstan Ramsay. Ramsay does encounter those individuals such

as Padre Blazon and Liesl who do play the magus role in
relation to him; in addition, however, the magus function is
internalized for Ramsay:

> In Ramsay's narrative the Magus
> figure is fused with the hero and
> Ramsay acquires the self-knowledge
> and insights previously provided by
> Domdaniel [in A Mixture of
> Frailties] largely on his
> own. The mentors are at the same
> time de-emphasized, though they
> appear at the appropriate phases
> of Ramsay's journey....
>   16

In The Manticore, Baltensperger argues, the magus takes the
form of the Jungian analyst, Jo von Haller:

> The figure of the Magus re-appears
> as a separate entity in David's
> psychoanalysis in the form of
> Dr. von Haller; not as a guide
> through external experience
> like Domdaniel, but rather as
> an interpreter of the dark
> symbolism of the interior
> spaces of the mind.
>   17

In whatever character the magus is cast--Liesl, Ramsay or
von Haller--the function remains the same. The magus serves
as a revealer who opens up a part of the being of the hearer
which has hitherto been neglected in a culture which focuses
primarily on external definitions of the human character.

The magus is characterized by an emphasis on the dark
side of the human personality. In Fifth Business Ramsay is
struck by the physical appearance of the magus character,
Liesl, in their first meeting. He claims that she was
"certainly the ugliest human creature I had ever seen."[18]
Her physical appearance is matched by a personality which can
be abrasive. The emphasis upon the unattractiveness and

acerbic tongue of Liesl is not intended to convey a picture of the magus as a one-dimensional devil. Rather, the dark traits are stressed in the magus in order to paint a picture of balance. In gnostic mythology the descending revealer often has to "put on the beast" in order to accomplish the task of liberating the entrapped light in creation. In this sense the revealer acts as a bridge between the corrupt world and the heavenly realm. The magus character, in Davies' novels, also acts as a bridge. Like the gnostic revealer, the magus puts on the beast. Like the gnostic revealer, the magus acts as a bridge between two visions of the human personality. This analogy is, of course, tempered by the fact that the reasons for the display of the dark side are different for Davies' magus. Unlike the gnostic revealer, Davies' characters do not live in a creation which is evil. Indeed, they actually live in an environment in which darkness is suppressed. Where the gnostic revealer displays a dark side in order to expose the light, the magus figure shows this side in order to expose the false light of a social order which denies the existence of the darkness. The central issue for the magus is not one of promoting darkness, but, rather, of providing a vision of balance. Ramsay makes this point when, in his failed attempt to act as a magus to Boy Staunton, he says, "I'm simply trying to recover something of the totality of your life. Don't you want to possess it as a whole--the bad with the good?"[19] Thus, the emphasis on the dark side in the magus is not intended to portray the magus as a one-dimensionally evil being. Indeed,

Ramsay's negative description of Liesl is immediately followed by the statement that "her voice was beautiful and her utterance was an educated speech of some foreign flavour."[20] Similarly her abrasive personality is ameliorated by moments in which she is tender and caring. The image of the magus as a wise wizard is strategically intended to awaken hidden parts of the human personality in the hearer.

The drive toward balance in one's self-knowledge requires different emphases at different points in the human journey. Because Davies perceives his culture to be one which has great difficulty with the dark side, the revealer as magus is most prominent in his stories. The revealer does, however, come in other forms. The saint also plays a role in the human drama of self-discovery.

b. The saint as revealer

There are three dimensions to saints which are important for Davies. The first is their attachment to a world quite alien to the hard-headed realism of Davies' small town. Ronald Sutherland makes the point that Davies' saint, Mary Dempster, represents the same qualities that are found in Leonard Cohen's saint, Kateri, in Beautiful Losers. These saints are, according to Sutherland, "symbolic of the capacity for mystery and faith, miracles and magic."[22] The magus reveals the dark side in a world which would deny it. The saint reveals mystery and magic in a world unaccustomed to thinking in such terms. A contrast exists between the

163

role played by the doctors--men of science--and Mary

Dempster--the demented saint--in relation to the illness of

Dunstan Ramsay's brother. The doctors are seen to be

rational and, yet, strangely impotent:

> Dr. McCausland sent to Toronto
> for a specialist--an alarming
> move in our village--and the
> specialist had very little to
> suggest except that immersions
> in warm water at four-hour
> intervals might help; he
> did not advise an operation
> yet, for at that time the
> removal of a kidney was an
> extremely grave matter.
>   23

When Willie, Dunstan's brother, takes a turn for the worse,

Dunstan summons Mary Dempster. Her calm demeanour has an air

of unreality about it and, yet, in Ramsay's account, she is

able to accomplish what the doctors cannot:

> Mrs. Dempster looked at him
> solemnly but not sadly, then
> she knelt by the bed and took
> his hands in hers and prayed.
> I had no way of knowing how
> long she prayed, but it was less
> than ten minutes.....After a
> while she raised her head and
> called him. 'Willie,' she in
> a low, infinitely kind, and
> indeed almost cheerful tone.
> Again, 'Willie.' I hoped till
> I ached. She shook his hands
> gently, as if rousing a sleeper.
> 'Willie.' Willie sighed and
> moved his legs a little. I
> fainted.
>   24

The saint is an affront to a rational world in which mystery

is suspect. Ramsay's trust in the ministry of Mary Dempster

and his subsequent conviction that she must be a saint

separate him from the mainstream of his own culture. When

the Chairman of the Board of the Colborne College informs

Ramsay that he is not to be appointed headmaster following

the war, it is Ramsay's interest in saints which is claimed

to be the stumbling block:

> 'It's this saint business of
> yours.......Religion in the
> school is one thing; there is
> a well-understood place for
> religion in education. But
> not this misty world of
> wonder-workers and holy
> wizards and juiceless women.
> Saints aren't in the picture
> at all.
>   25

In a world in which saints are not 'in the picture,' a

character designated a saint becomes another form of the

revealer who points toward a part of being denied by the

dominant culture of that world. The saint introduces mystery

into a context devoted to the concrete.

The second way in which Davies' saints serve as a

revealers is to be found in the alternate vision to orthodox

morality engendered by the life of the saint. In order to

avoid the attachment of conventional moral codes to his

saint Mary Dempster, Davies qualifies her sainthood with the

attributes of the fool. Father Regan explains the fool-saint

to Ramsay:

> 'Ever hear of a fool-saint?
> I thought not. As a matter
> of fact it's a Jewish idea,
> and the Jews are no fools,
> y'know. A fool-saint is
> somebody who seems to be
> full of holiness and loves
> everybody and does every good
> act he can, but because he s
> a fool it all comes to
> nothing--to worse than
> nothing, because it is virtue
> tainted with madness, and you

can't tell where it'll end
            up.'
                26
In Mary's case the "virtue tainted with madness" manifests

itself in the act of giving herself sexually to a tramp and,

thereby, transforming his life. Her act is one of generosity

which results in the conversion of the tramp, but it assaults

the moral standards of Deptford.   The Protestants of

Deptford can be characterized by Liesl's description of those

who "have the cruelty of doctrine without the poetic grace of

myth" and who "want to show they can be Christians without
        27
Christ."   Mary's act is both graceful and counter to

traditional codes of morality. As a fool-saint, Mary reveals

a world beyond the one controlled by the moral and

theological doctrines of orthodox Christianity.

        Finally, the saint as revealer is the one who exposes

pure goodness. In this sense, the saint is concerned with a

different emphasis than that of the magus. Both, however,

help to engender the pursuit of what Davies calls the

totality of life and both counter a culture which strives to

be one-dimensional. The magus introduces the dark side into

a world which attempts to deny its own darkness. The saint

embodies goodness in a world which, because of its denial of

darkness, is unable to distinguish true goodness from

adherence to moral codes. Wilfred Cude describes Davies'

understanding of the role of the saint in this way:

                There is much more than
                perversity or sensationalism
                to Davies' variegated
                depiction of his saint.
                Davies sees with wonderful
                clarity the beauty of a

human striving heroically
                    for the good: he sees
                    that beauty, in fact,
                    precisely because he also
                    sees the limitations and
                    obstacles such heroism
                    must encounter and finally
                    vanquish.28

The saint is the revealer of innate goodness in a society

bound by moral legalism. The saint is a symbol of mystery in

an culture concerned only with the explicable.

   c. Extra-terrestrial revealers

     The magi and saints of Davies' novels are cast in human

form. They are, however, connected to figures which

transcend the human in much the same way that the descended

gnostic revealers have an identity in the archons beyond the

sphere of creation. The mythic universe to which earthy

stories are connected receives more explicit emphasis in

Davies' later novels. In The Rebel Angels, the revealers who

in inhabit the particular form of the small Ontario town

known as the university have a connection to descending

angels who carry with them the task of revealing divine

secrets to mortals. Maria Theotoky links the academic

priest, Simon Darcourt, with these rebel angels:

                    Oh, Simon, you must remember the
                    Rebel Angels? They were real
                    angels, Samahazai and Azazel, and
                    they betrayed the secrets of Heaven
                    to King Solomon, and God threw
                    them out of Heaven. And did
                    they mope and plot vengeance?
                    Not they! They weren't sore-
                    headed egoists like Lucifer.
                    Instead they gave mankind
                    another push up the ladder,
                    they came to earth and taught
                    tongues, and healing and laws
                    and hygiene--taught everything--

and they were often special successes
with the 'daughters of men.'
It's a marvellous piece of
apocrypha, and I would have
expected you to know it, because
surely it is the explanation of
the origin of universities.
29

Davies carries the relationship between the mythic universe

and the contemporary Canadian story one step further in

What's Bred in the Bone in which beings who transcend

humanity serve not only as role models for the human

characters of the novel but actually play a role in the

narrative. Daimon's comments on the human action taking

place beneath him serve as a reminder to the reader that

there are forces beyond our own wills which help to determine

the course of our stories. Darcourt explains the role of the

daimons. His description with its emphasis on the goal of

self-knowing rather than morality is consistent with the

roles assigned to the magus, the angel and their human

counterparts:

> Of course you know what Hesiod
> calls daimons: spirits of the
> Golden Age, who act as guardians
> to mortals. Not tedious
> manifestations of moral conscience,
> like Guardian Angels, always
> pulling for Sunday School
> rightness and goodness. No,
> manifestations of the artistic
> conscience, who supply you
> with extra energy when it is
> needed, and tip you off when
> things aren't going as they
> should. Not wedded to what
> Christians think of as what
> is right, but to what is your
> destiny.
> 30

The daimon, Maimas, takes on the major function of the

revealer in the life of Frances Cornish by ensuring that he

will be one of the ones chosen to see beyond the world of his

birth. With the daimon's help, he will be enabled to escape

the strictures of village (in this case, Blairlogie) life and

escape to another world (once again, Europe) in which self-

knowledge is possible. The revealer, whether in human or

extra-terrestrial form, is essential. The daimon, Maimas

comments on his task:

> My dear Zadkiel, we haven't even
> touched on Blairlogie. There was
> dullness for you! But it's been
> my experience, over several
> aeons, that a good dull beginning
> does no harm to an interesting
> life. Your man runs so hard to
> get away from the dullness he was
> born to that you do very interesting
> things with him. Put them into
> his head to do himself, that's to
> say. Without me, Francis would
> just have been a good, solid
> citizen like the rest of them.
>   31

In a variety of images Davies repeats the story of the

gnostic revealer. The escape from the mundane to a place

where the spiritual adventure involved in knowing oneself is

possible is an individual task. There is a need, however,

for help along the way. This phenomenon links Davies with a

gnostic tradition in which, according to Perkins, "those

afflicted by the archons never escape by their own power.

They are always plucked from the situation by angelic

revealers."[32] Davies' characters, afflicted by the mores of

the small town, need a similar kind of assistance. They

receive that assistance from the magi, angels and daimons who

enter into the novels in both human and supra-human forms.

d. Women as revealers

In The Rebel Angels Simon Darcourt speaks of his attraction to the Gnostics. One of the primary components of this attraction is what Darcourt perceives to be the role of the feminine in gnostic literature:

> But he who troubles his head
> with apocryphal texts will not
> do so long before he peeps into
> heretical texts, and without
> any intention of becoming a
> Gnostic I found myself greatly
> taken up with the Gnostics
> because of the appeal of so
> much that they had to say.
> Their notion of Sophia seized
> upon my mind because it suited
> some ideas that I had tentatively
> and fearfully developed of my
> own accord.
>   1 like women, and the lack
> of a feminine presence in
> Christianity has long troubled..
> ....The Gnostics did better than
> that; they offered their followers
> Sophia.
>   Sophia, the feminine personification
> of God's Wisdom......
>   33

The contrast which Davies makes between orthodox Christianity and gnosticism with regard to women is similar to one made by Elaine Pagels in The Gnostic Gospels:

> In simplest form, many gnostic
> Christians correlate their
> description of God in both
> masculine and feminine terms
> with a complimentary description
> of human nature. Most often
> they refer to the creation
> account of Genesis 1, which
> suggests an equal or androgynous
> human creation.......The
> orthodox pattern is strikingly
> different: it describes God
> in exclusively masculine terms,
> and typically refers to Genesis 2

> to describe how Eve was created
> from Adam, and for his fulfillment.[34]

Davies' female characters, particularly those who play a

magian or saintly revealer role, reflect a gnostic

understanding of the role of the feminine in the transcendent

realm and in creation. It is an understanding which, for

both Davies and the gnostics, is based on a paradoxical

notion regarding the feminine principle. This paradox can be

observed in the story of the Sophia figure to whom Davies

refers.

In the Valentinian corpus Sophia is designated as a part

of the Godhead and as a player in the fall from divinity. In

"The Apocryphon of John," Barbelo (who was probably "from the

beginning one person with Sophia"[35]) appears as a part of an

androgynous Godhead:

> [The first power], the glory,
> Barbelo, the perfect glory in
> the aeons, the glory of the
> revelation, she glorified the
> virginal Spirit and praised
> him, because thanks to him
> she had come forth. This is
> the first thought, his image;
> she became the womb of everything
> for she is prior to them all,
> the Mother-Father, the first
> Man, the holy Spirit, the
> thrice-male, the thrice-powerful,
> the thrice-named androgynous
> one, and the eternal aeon among the
> invisible ones, and the first
> to come forth.[36]

Barbelo is a part of the process which leads to the begetting

of a divine son (identified in the "Apocryphon of John" with

the heavenly Christ) who, in turn, is followed by the layers

of aeons which form the structure of the gnostic cosmogony.

It is at this point in the narrative that a critical event occurs in which the feminine dimension of the Godhead displays another side. Sophia, driven by her passion, determines to create a likeness of herself without the consent of her consort. With this action, the bi-sexual harmony of the Godhead is broken. The creature, fashioned in the shape of a serpent and a lion, is called Jaldabaoth. Jaldabaoth is the Demiurge, the evil creator of the world.

The passion-filled, independent action of Sophia is characterized by the introduction of a curtain or shadow into the gnostic universe which deepens and more profoundly distances the realm of Light in the descent through the aeons to the lowest level--earthly creation. Hans Jonas describes this devolution as it appears in "The Hypostasis of the Archons" and the "Origin of the World":

> The Hypostasis of the Archons and
> the Origin of the World both
> tell us that Pistis Sophia (a) desired
> to produce alone, without her consort,
> a work that would be like unto the
> first-existing Light: it came forth
> as a celestial image which
> (b)) constituted a curtain
> between the higher realms of
> light and the later-born, inferior
> aeons; and a shadow extends
> beneath the curtain, that is,
> on its outer side which faces
> away from the light. The shadow,
> which was called 'Darkness,'
> becomes matter; and out of
> this matter comes forth, as an
> abortion, the lion-shaped
> Ialdabaoth
> 37

Sophia eventually realizes the loss that has occurred as a result of her action and, through repentance, is restored to the Pleroma.

The image of Sophia as a part of the God-head and as one involved in redemption and restoration and as one culpable in the events leading to the fall represents the paradox which is an essential part of the feminine in the gnostic imagination. In Valentinian gnosticism this paradox is expressed in the notion of an upper and lower Sophia. The paradox is not resolved by making these two sides of Sophia two separate entities. Jonas states that the lower Sophia remains "the fallen shape of the former [the upper Sophia] and the bearer of all the divine distress and indignities following from the fall."[38]

The paradoxical nature of the feminine principle in gnosticism is most vividly expressed in a short tractate, "The Thunder, Perfect Mind". In the tractate, a female revealer exposes her dual nature:

> For I am the first and the last.
> I am the honored one and the scorned one.
> I am the whore and the holy one.
> I am the wife and the virgin.
> I am <the mother> and the daughter.
> I am the members of my mother.
> I am the barren one
>   and many are her sons.[39]

This dual nature of the feminine becomes critical in a system in which wisdom requires an understanding of both darkness and light. The lower part of the Sophia--the scorned one, the whore--stands in relationship to humankind which has become ensnared in creation. The upper part--the honoured one, the holy one--gives a vision of the Light to which the awakened soul is called to travel. This paradoxical

character in the gnostic story is the one who bridges the realm of Light--unknowable in solely human terms--and the fallen creation.

In the gnostic stories, the woman who is both divine and fallen appears in different forms. In his discussion of Simon Magus, Hans Jonas comments:

> A singular feature of Simon's
> terrestrial journey was that he
> took about with him a woman called
> Helena who he said he had found
> in a brothel in Tyre and who,
> according to him, was the latest
> and lowliest incarnation of the
> fallen 'Thought' of God, redeemed
> by him and a means of redemption
> for all who believed in them both...[40]

The prostitute becomes a redeemer. The paradox exists in the person of Helena.

The writings of the Christian gnostics reveal both poles of the paradoxical feminine character. In "The Gospel of Mary", for example, it is the woman who possesses knowledge hidden from the rest of the disciples: "Mary answered and said, 'What is hidden from you I will proclaim to you."[41] She is claimed to be the one loved by Jesus more than any of the others. This image of the honoured Mary can be countered with another image from "The Gospel of Thomas" in which Mary, while worthy of salvation, is, in her human nature, lower than the males in the company:

> Simon Peter said to them, "Let
> Mary leave us, for women are not
> worthy of Life."
> Jesus said, "I myself shall
> lead her in order to make her
> male, so that she too may become
> a living spirit resembling you

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males. For every woman who will
make herself male will enter the
Kingdom of Heaven."
                    42
These two images of Mary are reminiscent of the upper and

lower Sophia. The feminine is seen to be close to the

Godhead and, yet, also the representation of the corruption

of creation.

Two principles inform Davies' attitude toward women and

his employment of women characters as revealers. The first

principle is derived from Davies' attraction to the image of

Sophia.   The paradoxical nature of being both honoured and

scorned reflects, for Davies, the reality of those who

possess self-understanding and who are able to bridge the

world of spiritual imprisonment and the world of light.

Those feminine characters in Davies' novels who bear the dual

description of being scorned and honoured are the ones who

are able to help others in the journey to self-realization.

The second principle maintained by Davies in the

creation of his feminine characters is that when the duality

of character is repressed, the woman becomes a moral monster.

The contrast between these two principles can be seen by an

examination of the way in which the women characters are

developed in the first novel of the Deptford trilogy.

Dunstan Ramsay's mother appears in <u>Fifth Business</u> as a

woman whose character reflects the second principle. When

f rst encountered in the novel, she is portrayed as strong

sensible woman who is able to display compassion. When Dr.

McCausland requires assistance for the care of the premature

Paul Dempster, Mrs. Ramsay is called. Dunstan describes the

attributes which suited her to this task:

> She was not, I must make clear,
> in any sense a midwife or a
> trained person--simply a woman
> of good sense and kindness of
> heart who enjoyed the authority
> of nursing and the mystery which
> at that time still hung about
> the peculiarly feminine functions.
> She spent a great part of each
> day and not a few nights at the
> Dempsters during that six months;
> other women helped when they
> could, but my mother was the
> acknowledged high priestess....
> 43

This image of competent goodness shifts dramatically after

Mary Dempster's sexual adventure with the tramp. Mrs.

Ramsay's leadership in care-giving is converted to leadership

in Deptford's strong disapproval of the actions of the

Baptist minister's wife. Dunstan recalls an argument between

his parents on the subject of Mary Dempster's behaviour:

> My father accused my mother of
> wanting charity; she replied that
> as the mother of two boys she had
> standards of decency to defend.
> That was the meat of the quarrel,
> but before it had gone very far
> it reached a point where she said
> that if he was going to stand
> up for filthy behaviour and
> adultery he was a long way from
> the man she had married, and he
> was saying that he had never
> known she had a cruel streak.
> (I could have told him something
> about that.)
> 44

The key to understanding the character of Mrs. Dempster is to

be found in her adherance to a strict moral code which can,

at one time, elicit acts of kindness, and, at other times,

the cold shunning of those who do not fit within the code.

There is an absolute quality to the definition of goodness in

the code and the entertainment of possibilities arising from the other side--the shadow of the code--is repressed. This strict devotion to one moral path is reflected in R. L. Radford's comment on Mrs. Ramsay's reaction to Mary Dempster:

> Led by Mrs. Ramsay, their [the people of Deptford] hysterical reaction to her [Mary Dempster's] free action, in offering herself to a sex-starved tramp just because 'he wanted it so badly', follows exactly Freud's definition of the treatment of the taboo-breaker......His [Ramsay's] own mother rules by dogma and follows the most conventional values of her society.[45]

Mrs. Ramsay's world view is defined by the mores of Deptford. In her actions, she shows herself to be defined by a puritan morality which is not transcended by other spiritual visions. Mrs. Ramsay, in other words, resembles a lower Sophia in the sense that she is held captive by one world view. Her inability to see redeeming possibilities in Mary's actions is an indication of her blindness to that which exists beyond her world.

David Monaghan makes the point that the character of Ramsay's mother is repeated in his encounter with Diana Marfleet. Diana is the volunteer nurse who cares for Ramsay as he recovers from his war injuries. Like Mrs. Ramsay, she is a competent, caring figure. Her background differs from that of Deptford, but, like the world of Mrs. Ramsay, it is seen to be self-contained: "But she had been raised on a mental diet of heroism, Empire, decency and the emotional superiority of womanhood..."[46] Her devotion to Dunstan

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reflects the mores of charity found in her world rather than a mysterious attraction which transcends that world: "She had fallen in love with me because she felt she had made whatever I was out of a smashed-up and insensible hospital case..."[47] Managhan comments:

> Having escaped his mother, Ramsay
> falls under the equally destructive
> influence of Diana Marfleet, who
> teaches him to cultivate the
> outer man at the expense of the
> inner.....The fact that Ramsay
> grants his sexual initiation the
> same importance as seeing
> 'Chin-Chin-Chow' indicates the
> lack of any deep spiritual
> implications in his relationship
> with Diana.[48]

Neither Mrs. Ramsay nor Diana are women who can play the role of significant helpers to Dunstan on his spiritual quest. They remain too one-dimensional in their uncritical attachment to a familiar world.

Mary Dempster represents the other side of the coin. Unlike Mrs. Ramsay and Diana, she is not tied to the culture in which she lives. Indeed, her personality and her actions run so counter to her culture that she is seen by the townsfolk to be mad. Dunstan describes Mary's role in relation to her world in this way:

> She knew she was in disgrace
> with the world, but did not
> feel disgraced; she knew she
> was jeered at, but felt no
> humiliation. She lived by a
> light that arose within...
> ...It was a though she were
> an exile from a world that
> saw things her way, and though
> she was sorry Deptford did
> not understand her she was
> not resentful.[49]

Mary plays a significantly different role in Ramsay's life
than that of his mother or Diana. Her estrangement from the
world of Deptford prompts Dunstan to imagine another world in
which saints are taken seriously. While her counter-cultural
existence is important in Dunstan's spiritual explorations,
she does not play the role of an active helper in those
explorations. While distinct from the other women in the
early stages of Dunstan's life, she is similar to them in the
sense that she, too, is perceived to be one-dimensional.
Where Diana and Mrs. Ramsay are defined by the dominant
culture in which they live, Mary is defined by being
completely outside that culture. She represents a form of
goodness which has no place in Deptford. The paradoxical
character of the Sophia figure cannot be applied to Mary
Dempster because she has never descended to and taken on the
lower world. She remains isolated among the saints who never
become engaged in the hard realities of the world. There is
only one side of Mary presented to the reader. For Ramsay,
"his 'saint' is no more allowed full humanity than Staunton's
'whoor'".[50]

Marilyn Chapman, in her article, "Female Archetypes in
Fifth Business reminds us of Carl Jung's contention that the
anima--the feminine part of our being--goes through stages of
development:

> Jung suggests that the first
> stage in the anima's normal
> development emerges as a
> result of man's need for
> instinctual, biological
> relations and is represented

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> by Eve; the second stage
> emerges from his need for a
> romantic, sexual relationship
> and is represented by Helen;
> the third stage emerges from
> his yearning for spiritual
> growth and is represented by
> the Virgin Mary; the fourth
> stage emerges from his thirst
> for wisdom and self-knowledge
> and is represented by Sapientia.
> 51

The women in the early part of Ramsay's life can be seen as symbols of the first stages in the development of Ramsay's anima. His mother is connected to the early need for instinctual, biological relations; Diana relates to the need for romantic, sexual relations and Mary to the yearning for spiritual growth. All three women are limited to their specific role in the drama and, once the stage represented by that role is passed, they disappear from the scene.

It is at the final stage that the complex woman—the woman capable of holding both sides of the Sophia within her personality—emerges. F. L. Radford comments:

> Divided into saints, demons, or
> nonentities, women acquire
> individuality and importance
> for him only when they bring to
> the surface the fear and desire
> associated with the mother
> image. It is only after he
> passes the test of "the loathly
> lady" in meeting, fighting and
> embracing Liesl that he is able
> to reconcile the demonic and
> angelic sides of the Magna
> Mater and accept woman as a
> whole being.
> 52

The women before Liesl play important roles in Ramsay's life. It is Liesl, however, who is the revealer most akin to a gnostic Sophia.

Liesl contains the paradox of Sophia within her. In physical appearance and in manner she is the one who evokes scorn. In her beauty of voice and her ability to enable her hearers to understand themselves, she is honoured by Ramsay and the other Deptford protagonists who follow him.

Liesl's emergence as the primary revealer of the Deptford trilogy is predicted in mythic terms. When Dunstan engages in his study of saints, he becomes particularly fascinated by a Portuguese hermaphrodite, Wilgefortis. Wilgefortis represents the holding together of opposites which will be realized in the person of Liesl. Nancy Bjerring states:

> Dunstan picks up bits of
> information about saints,
> and soon becomes intrigued
> by one particularly odd
> saint: Wilgefortis, a
> Portuguese hermaphrodite.
> Although on the surface,
> Dunstan's search is an
> intellectual preoccupation
> with the discovery of
> knowledge, the nature of this
> saint is a clue to Dunstan's
> actual search. The hermaphrodite
> is classically the symbol for
> the whole self--the totality
> of male and female, reason
> and passion, which since their
> division has caused much of the
> misery of mankind. Dunstan's
> search is for the 'whole'
> selfhood, but he does not yet
> see it in these terms."
> 53

Wisdom is to be found in the paradoxical meeting of opposites. This image is personified in Liesl. Because she contains both scorn and honour within her she can talk, with

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authority, about the worlds which restrain self-knowing (the
"cruel way of life" engendered by an uncompromising
Calvinism) and those in which one can discover how "you fit
into poetry and myth".[54]

Gnosticism finds two places--the higher unknowable realm
and Light and the lower realm of the darkness of creation--
reflected in the same person of Sophia. As one who retains
the memory of the higher while enmeshed in the lower, Sophia
is open to the redemption that comes through <u>gnosis</u>. The
presence of her story in gnostic mythology serves the
function of revealing the same possibility of redemption
through <u>gnosis</u> to the hearers. For Davies, the revealer
woman, imaged in the person of Liesl, serves the same
function. Her story, as the one who has known both scorn and
honour, has the power to impart a similar kind of knowing to
her hearers.   In both gnosticism and Davies' writing, the
prominence given to the feminine character distinguishes them
from those forms of orthodoxy which are characterized by a
neglect of the feminine in relation to both the Godhead and
humanity. Carl Jung made particular note of the importance
of the feminine in gnostic systems in relation to the
significance it held for his psychology. Dart contrasts
Freud and Jung on this point:

> Jung credited Sigmund Freud
> with introducing the classical
> Gnostic motif of the wicked
> paternal authority into modern
> psychology. The evil Creator
> God of the Gnostics 'reappeared
> in the Freudian myth of the
> primal father and the gloomy

superego deriving from that father,'
Jung said. 'In Freud's myth
he became a demon who created
a world of disappointments,
illusions and suffering.'
　　　　Missing from Freud's
system, Jung said, was another
essential aspect of Gnosticism--
the primordial feminine spirit
from another, higher god who
gave humans the possibility of
spiritual transformation.
　　　　　　　　　　　55

The women of Davies' narrative--Liesl in the Deptford

trilogy, Mary Dempster in Fifth Business, Jo von Haller in

The Manticore, Milady in World of Wonders,and Maria's mother

in The Rebel Angels--are diverse characters who hold in

common the fact that they all perform the role of agents of

"spiritual transformation."

C. The Revealing Impact of Mythic Patterns

The journey toward wholeness is aided not only by

individuals fulfilling mythic roles, but, also by patterns of

transformation along the way which find their roots in

ancient stories. Davies, in his novels, finds significance

in traditional symbols for change which have the power to

remind one that that which is repressive in the current

environment can be transformed, through gnosis, into

something else. Three of these patterns are granted

particular attention--name changing, alchemy and magic.

1. Changing names

The changing of one's name as a sign of transformation

has deep roots in western tradition. In the Hebrew

scriptures, the establishment of the covenant between God and

Abram is marked by Abram becoming Abraham and Sara, Sarah.

In the Christian scriptures the converted Saul becomes Paul.
In gnostic writing the new name is a sign of the conviction
that one's earthly name, like everything else in creation, is
tainted with corruption. The new name is a sign of true
identity which comes from the knowledge of whence one has
come and whither one is going. Elaine Pagels comments on the
phenomenon in the "Gospel of Truth":

> The Gospel of Truth also
> expresses this in metaphor:
> each person must receive
> 'his own name'--not, of course,
> one's ordinary name, but one's
> true identity. Those who are
> 'the sons of interior knowledge'
> gain the power to speak their
> own names.56

The new name is the mark of the authentic self released from
the captivity of creation.

Patricia Monk ties the practice of changing one's name
to the psychic and spiritual notion of re-birth. The second
birth marks the beginning of that part of one's life in which
seeking self-understanding and wholeness is the primary
agenda. This is a common phenomenon in a number of human
myth systems. Monk comments:

> ....the journey represents a
> second birth into a higher stage
> of development. In primitive
> societies it is visible as the
> rite of initiation in which the
> the child or adolescent is
> acknowledged as an adult member
> of the group....In symbolic
> form it is presented as pseudo-
> death or a death-analogue, and
> in mythic and literary material
> often inaugurates the full
> hero-journey. In Fifth Business,
> Ramsay's long coma (after being
> wounded at Passchendaele) and

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return to consciousness constitute
                    a second birth which forms the
                    prologue to the quest for a whole
                    self that takes him almost the
                    rest of his life.
                                        57

Ramsay takes a new name after he has died figuratively at

Passchendaele and is brought to life again through the

spiritual ministrations of the image of Mary Dempster and the

physical care of his nurse, Diana Mar leet. This pattern is

repeated in other places in Davies' na itive. In Leaven of

Malice, the insecure figure of Pearl Vambrance reaches a

turning point in her life in which she is able to challenge

her overbearing father and discover a new confident way of

living. She is aided in this by the love of Solly

Bridgewater. This transformation is marked by the taking of

a new name, Veronica. In World of Wonders, Liesl reveals

that her name change came following her discovery, through

the attention and love of Eisengrim, that her life did not

need to be defined by her ape-like appearance or the

bitterness of her adolescence.

     The metaphor of naming is not always used to denote a

move toward authenticity. Davies also uses the choosing of a

new name to indicate an opposite movement. In the case of

Boy Staunton, the change from Percy Boyd Staunton to Boy is

an indication of what Monaghan calls "the false adulthood

which most of us achieve by choosing to shape ourselves
                                                  58
according to the demands of a specific social code."   Boy

adopts a childish name to indicate his avoidance of the

possibility of self-knowledge in adulthood. His life is

defined by the expectations of a repressive world rather than

by the freedom of his own soul.

ii. Alchemy

In historical terms alchemy is often seen as the chemistry of the middle ages. Functionally, it was centered around the process of transforming baser metals into gold. As a metaphor, alchemy means a great deal more than a primitive science which, to the modern mind, seems nonsensical.

Carl Jung became fascinated with alchemy because he saw in it an important insight into the psychology of the alchemist. The issue, for Jung, was not so much the possibility of the transmutation of physical objects, as the existence of this medieval science as a sign of the projections of the human unconscious. In his study, Psychology and Alchemy, Jung states:

> The real nature of matter was
> unknown to the alchemist: he
> knew it only in hints. In seeking
> to explore it he projected the
> unconscious into the darkness of
> matter in order to illuminate it.
> In order to explain the mystery
> of matter he projected yet another
> mystery--his own unknown psychic
> background--into what was to be
> explained: Obscurum per
> obscurius, ignotum per ignotis!
> 59

Alchemy points to the existence of something beyond the sensible world. Jung comments:

> The alchemist did not practise
> his art because he believed on
> theoretical grounds in correspondence;
> the point is that he had a theory
> of correspondence because he
> experienced the presence of pre-
> existing ideas in physical matter.
> 60

This metaphorical understanding of alchemy gives it a significance which extends beyond its period of prominence in history. Jung ties the image of alchemy to gnostic themes of redemption. Stephan Hoeller describes this connection:

> With Paracelsus [a sixteenth century
> Swiss alchemist], Jung held that
> in human life we possess two
> sources of Gnosis, or salvific
> knowledge. One of these is
> Lumen Dei, the light proceeding
> from the unmanifest Godhead, the
> other is Lumen Naturae, the light
> hidden in matter and the forces
> of nature. While the Divine
> Light may be discerned and
> appreciated in revelation and in
> the mystery of the Incarnation,
> the Light of Nature needs to be
> released through alchemy before
> it can become fully operative.61

Transmutation of the physical world parallels the movement of the soul from the realm of Darkness to the light. The idea of gold trapped in a baser metal becomes a powerful metaphor for a vision of the world in which the Light is caught in a corrupt creation.

Robertson Davies makes use of the alchemy metaphor in his novels. The most obvious example occurs in The Rebel Angels. One of the minor characters, Professor Froats, is a scientist who does experiments with human excrement. Hollier compares his attempts to find something of worth in the material with which he works to the practice of alchemy:

> 'It's astonishingly similar to
> alchemy in basic principle--the
> recognition of what is of worth
> in that which is scorned by the
> unseeing. The alchemist's long
> quest for the Stone, and the
> biblical stone which the builders

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refused becoming the headstone
of the corner.'

62

The alchemical allusion in <u>The Rebel Angels</u> is obvious.
A broader and more subtle use of the alchemy metaphor is
found in the Deptford trilogy. One physical object remains
in the story from the first pages of <u>Fifth Business</u> to the
end of <u>World of Wonders</u>. It is the stone which Percy
Staunton [who will become Boy Staunton] throws at Dunstable
Ramsay [who will become Dunstan Ramsay] in the form of a
snowball. Ramsay ducks and the stone hits Mary Dempster
causing the premature delivery of her child Paul [who will
become Magnus Eisengrim] and setting Mary on the path toward
madness. Ramsay keeps the stone. At the end of <u>World of
Wonders</u>, he comments:

> Magnus thinks I kept the stone
> for spite, and I suppose there
> was something of that in it.
> But I also kept it to be a
> continual reminder of the
> consequences that can follow
> a single action.

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The stone becomes, for Ramsay, a symbol of the dramatic
transformations which are possible in life. This inanimate
object, having been thrown, affects the outcomes of several
lives. Jung's observation that the mystery of the stone is a
projection of the mystery of the unknown psychic background
of the alchemist is translated, in Davies' fiction, into the
conviction that the thrown stone uncovers futures for those
affected by it, far removed from what could have extrapolated
from their environment. The wife of the Baptist parson
becomes a fool- saint who gives herself to a tramp in a

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garbage dump. Dunstable, the child of Scottish practicality,

becomes a hagiographer. Paul, the son of the Baptist parson,

becomes a magician.

The stone, in a particular way, manifests its power over

Boy Staunton who suppresses its significance until the last

moment. When, at the end of <u>Fifth Business</u>, Dunstan

confronts Boy with the story of the stone, Boy claims to have

forgotten about the incident. Shortly after this encounter

Boy is found dead in his submerged car with the stone

clenched between his teeth. When Magnus Eisengrim is asked,

at his performance on the Saturday evening following Boy's

funeral, the identity of Boy's killer, his answer contains

allusions to the repressed parts of Boy's <u>persona</u>, to the one

who was the keeper of a conscience for which Boy refused

responsibility. The keeper of the conscience is also the

keeper of the stone:

> 'He was killed by the usual
> cabal: by himself, first of
> all; by the woman he knew;
> by the woman he did not know;
> by the man who granted his
> inmost wish; and by the
> inevitable fifth, who was
> keeper of his conscience and
> keeper of the stone.'
> 64

At the end of <u>World of Wonders</u>, Eisengrim recounts his

attempt to persuade Staunton to take the power of the stone

seriously by throwing it a second time in a ritual which

would involve hitting himself. Boy's weariness with a world

in which sexual prowess and social achievements are no longer

sustaining can be ameliorated by the power of the stone to

reveal the inner life. Eisengrim's final advice to Staunton

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is to swallow the stone. To the end, Staunton remains tied
to the world in which such spiritual adventures are
impossible and in which, therefore, metaphors have no
meaning. As a result, he takes Eisengrim's advice literally.

The stone of the Deptford trilogy is the inanimate
equivalent of the revealer figures in the novels. Its
presence points toward the possibility of escape from the
mundane and recovery of an inner agenda obscured by the
world. Mary, Dunstable and Paul are touched by the stone in
such a way that this agenda is revealed. Boy, on the other
hand, is unable to hear the message of the stone.

iii. Magic

Just as alchemy is a science beyond the ken of the small
Ontario towns of Davies' fiction, magic would be perceived to
be similarly esoteric. The books on magic in the Deptford
library were discovered by Ramsay in a locked closet:

> My special treasures were The
> Secrets of Stage Conjuring by
> Robert-Houdin and Modern Magic
> and Later Magic by Professor
> Hoffman; they had been banished
> as uninteresting--uninteresting!--
> and as soon as I saw them I
> knew that fate meant them for me.
> By studying them I should become
> a conjurer, astonish everybody,
> win the breathless admiration
> of Leola Cruickshank, and become
> a great power.
> 65

Magic, like the alchemist's stone, promises the
transformation of the commonplace. This promise is locked
away in closets in the libraries of Davies' small towns, but,
when discovered, it offers a new-found power to the ·

recipient. For Ramsay, this power is never exercised beyond

the form of a hobby.   For Paul Dempster, it becomes the

primary metaphor of his escape from a world in which he is

not at home.

In his study of the social theory of magic, Daniel

O'Keefe relates his definition of magic to the survival of

the inner self. He says:

> What, then, is magic? If religion
> is the projection of the over-
> whelming power of the group,
> and if magic derives from religion,
> but sets itself up on a some-
> what independent basis to help
> individuals, and is, at the same
> time, frequently reported to be
> hostile toward religion...then is
> not the answer apparent? Magic
> is the expropriation of religious
> collective representations for
> individual or subgroup purposes--
> to enable the individual ego to
> resist psychic extinction or the
> subgroup to resist cognitive
> collapse.
>   66

In a world hostile to mystery, magic functions as that which

keeps alive the interest in the mysteries of those parts of

the self not defined by the external world.

Magic has an obvious appeal to the gnostic spirit.

Gnosticism's conviction that creation is a prison in which

the true self is held captive would find the magic metaphor,

which overturns the natural order and gives honour to the

mysterious definition of the inner self, attractive.   O'Keefe

comments:

> Implicit in all magical theosophies
> East and West is a recognition of
> the artificial ("magical") and
> oppressive nature of social reality.
> Magic theosophies arise when the

> social weight becomes too heavy,
> and they teach man to fight magic
> with magic.....Gnosticism is an
> anti-religious theosophy, a theology
> of magic masquerading as a
> religion. It attacks God and
> religion as projections of an
> oppressive society, as many magic
> protest sects do.
> <div align="center">67</div>

The relationship between the oppressiveness of a social

order and an interest in magic is born out in the story of

Magnus Eisengrim. The only child of a strict and

unimaginative father, Paul Dempster leads a lonely existence.

He is scorned by Deptford society as a result of his

relationship to the fallen woman, Mary. His visit to the

touring fair, "Wanless's World of Wonders," provides Paul

with an opportunity for escape from a world in which he is

not welcome. It is the magician, Willard, who, by his magic,

reveals a world beyond Deptford:

> Willard laughed a mocking laugh.
> Oh, very Mephistophelian! It
> sounded like a trumpet call to
> me, because I had never heard
> anybody laugh like that before.
> He was laughing at us, for having
> been deceived. What power! What
> glorious command over lesser
> humanity! Silly people often
> say that they are enraptured by
> something which has merely
> pleased them, but I was truly
> enraptured. I was utterly unaware
> of myself, whirled into a new sort
> of comprehension of life by what
> I saw.
> <div align="center">68</div>

For Paul, magic is the metaphor of escape. The world in

which "God's tender mercies had never reached the Deptford
<div align="center">69</div>
school-yard" offers no hope to the outcast. It is only

when magic exercises its power of deception in that sensible

<div align="center">192</div>

world that the possibility of another world is opened up.
When the magician reveals things to be not as they seem in
the immediate world, a new reality emerges. It is this
metaphoric understanding of magic which gives it power.
Eisengrim comments that the practice of magic loses that
power when an audience receives it on a literal level. After
working with children, he states:

> Children are a miserable audience
> for magic; everybody thinks they
> are fond of marvels, but they are
> generally literal-minded little
> toughs who want to know how
> everything is done; they have
> not yet attained to the sophistication
> that takes pleasure in being
> deceived.
> 70

The pleasure in being deceived comes with the realization
that present reality can be over-turned. Magic, like alchemy
and name-changing, reveals a level of consciousness which
serves as a haven from the oppressive social consciousness of
the Protestant village.

For Davies, as for the gnostic writers, help is needed
in the process of spiritual transformation. In gnosticism,
revealers are required to awaken the acosmic light in the
inner self. In Davies' novels individuals who play a
revelatory role and mythic patterns serve to expose the
unlived side of the lives of their hearers. It is the
knowledge of the self and, especially, those repressed parts
of the self which is the goal of the revelation which comes
from the revealers--human and extra-terrestrial--and from the
recurring patterns to be found in the human story.

VI. DUALISM AND THE NATURE OF EVIL

VI. Dualism and the Nature of Evil

A. Gnostic Dualism

The gnostic spirit is essentially dualistic. The evil creation and that to which the entrapped soul is called are opposed to one another as darkness is to light. The way of escape--gnosis--is conscious of both the dark human condition and of the spark of light within. The revealers who aid the escape manifest both the "putting on" of corrupt corporality and the role of emissaries of the divine.

The dualism of ancient gnosticism is not an aberration in relation from the milieu in which it arose. Hans Jonas makes the point that the religious climate at the beginning of the Christian era in the ancient near east was characterized by religious movements that exhibited a highly transcendent conception of God and which were concerned mainly with salvation. They were also dualistic:

> Finally, they maintain a radical
> dualism of realms of being--
> God and the world, spirit and matter,
> soul and body, light and darkness,
> good and evil, life and death--and
> consequently an extreme polarization
> of existence affecting not only
> man but reality as a whole: the
> general religion of the period
> is a dualistic transcendent
> religion of salvation.
> 1

The dualism found in ancient gnostic literature is consistent with contemporary religious patterns. The conflict with Jewish and Christian orthodoxy comes with regard to the manner in which dualistic themes are expressed. Where the Hebrew and Christian scriptures envision a good God who is knowable by humanity in active countering of evil--"[God has]

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scattered the proud with all their plans"[2] --the unknown God remains remote, with the descended and corrupt fragments of the Godhead most accessible to humankind. A created order in which good and evil do battle in the day to day lives of people is countered, in gnosticism, with a profoundly evil creation which can only be escaped.

Within gnosticism itself, as well, consistent dualistic patterns do not exist. As mentioned in Chapter III, the origins of dualism differ among the various bodies of literature. Iranian gnosticism contains a radical dualism based on the assumption that good and evil originated at the same time and are, thus, on an equal footing. Armstrong comments:

> In all forms of Iranian dualism
> evil is quite ferociously positive
> and aggressive. It is conflict-
> dualism of the most pugnacious
> kind. (Iranian-style conflict-
> dualism, with a strongly positive
> concept of evil, seems still to be
> curiously popular among some
> Christians, though it is not
> favoured by the greatest
> theologians of the classical
> Christian tradition....)[3]

This Iranian version of dualism appears in the Sethian and Ophite streams of gnostic tradition and is picked up by Mani. Hans Jonas claims that the simplicity of this understanding of the relationship between good and evil helps to explain the fact that "Mani's is the only gnostic system which became a broad historical force, and the religion based on it [Zoroastrianism] must, in spite of its eventual downfall, be ranked among the major religions of mankind.[4]

Valentinianism, on the other hand, developed an
evolutionary theory behind its dualism. Conflict within the
Godhead, marked by Sophia's dis-harmonious generation of the
Demiurge, starts a chain reaction which results in a deep
separation of earthly darkness from the originating light.
The divine drama implicit in Valentinianism is more complex
than that found in Iranian gnostic systems.

In The Gospel of Philip, a tractate in the Valentinian
tradition, a sense of unity preceding and following division
can be seen:

> Light and darkness, life and death
> right and left, are brother of one
> another. They are inseparable.
> Because of this neither are the
> good good, nor the evil evil, nor
> death death. For this reason each
> one will dissolve into its original
> nature. But those who are exalted
> above the world are indissoluble,
> eternal.
> 5

This theme of unity and division is lived out in the human
story in "The Gospel of Philip". The separation of Eve from
Adam is a mark of the breakdown of an original androgynous
unity. Salvation in this system comes when the shattered
unity of the Godhead and the corresponding disunity of
humanity represented in the separation of the sexes is
restored through gnosis. Jonas describes this process of re-
unification as it occurs in "The Gospel of Truth":

> The spirits transformed by knowledge
> rest in the middle region of the
> Ogdoad, where their Mother the Sophia
> clothed with them awaits the con-
> summation of the world. Her own final

> salvation takes place when all the
> pneumatic elements in the world have
> been "formed" by knowledge and
> perfected. Then the spirits,
> stripped of their souls, with their
> Mother enter the Pleroma, which
> becomes the bridal chamber in which
> takes place the marriage of Sophia
> with Jesus and that of the spirits
> with their bridegrooms, the angels
> around Jesus.
>   6

The profound unity of the Plemora is restored and the earth

ceases to exist. Just as disunity in the human person

results from disunity in the Godhead, so the inclusion of the

individual in the Pleroma follows the restoration of the

unity of the Godhead.

The particular nature of gnostic dualism is revealed in

the contrast which Jonas makes between the Hellenic

understanding of the relation between God and the world and

that of the gnostics. In Greek thought the world is a

manifestation of the divine:

> In the passage from Cicero we
> found that the cosmos is the
> All, i. e., that there is nothing
> beside it and nothing which is
> not a part of it, and that this
> all-embracing whole is God.
> This is the specific position
> of Stoic pantheism; but also
> in the Aristotelian scheme the
> relation of Nature to the divine
> Nous, though the latter is not
> itself immanent in the world,
> leads essentially to the same
> result of making the world a
> manifestation of the divine; and
> even the supreme transcendentalism
> of Plotinus left this relation intact.
>   7

The gnostic understanding of the relationship between God and

the world takes on a dramatically different cast. The

unknowable God of the gnostics is not only extra-mundane but,

also, contra-mundane. There is no compatibility between God and the world. When this relationship is mirrored in the human experience, the connection to a God utterly other than creation is to be found in the inner self. The spark of divinity in the human has no relationship to the corporal. Indeed, just as God stands in unalterable opposition to the world, the inner being of the human can suffer no accommodation with the world and achieve restoration to the Fullness. Jonas expresses this separation of the inner self from the world in radical terms:

> And the anthropological aspect
> holds that man's inner self is
> not part of the world, of the
> demiurge's creation and domain,
> but is within that world as totally
> transcendent and as incommensurate
> to all cosmic modes of being as
> is its transmundane counterpart,
> the unkown God without.
> 8

The fact that the separation of the unknown God from creation is mirrored in the alienation of the inner self from the world puts a particular cast on the anthopological dualism found in gnosticism. The struggle between true identity and degenerate illusion, insofar as human understanding is concerned, must be played out in an acosmic drama. It cannot be simply a human story since that which distinguishes humanity from the trans-mundane realm is defined by only one side of the struggle. Creation itself, by its nature, lacks the resources to liberate the inner self. A psychic escape from creation is the only way in which the other side of the gnostic dualism--the divine spark

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buried within--can be revealed.

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the dualistic gnostic anthopology, implies that when the created order is considered, the alternative to that order is to be found in acosmic pre-history. When a means of escape from the created order is required, a gnosis focused on that in relation to which the present earth is without redeeming value is the way. When revealers are needed to awaken the inner self to the way of escape through gnosis, those revealers must not be of the world (although, like Derdekeas, they may put on the beast--the body--in order to accomplish their redeeming mission). The dualism of gnosticism, in other words, cannot be experienced in earthly existence.

B. Davies' Dualism

1. Identification of the shadow

Authentic being in Davies' novels is tied to an unresolved dualism. The human personality contains two sides. Self-understanding implies a recognition of human paradoxes cast in a number of different ways. Terry Goldie comments that "throughout the [Deptford] trilogy, Davies asserts the need to achieve a proper balance between various polarities, such as masculine and feminine, reason and emotion, light and dark, saint and magus, and good and evil."[9] This concern to avoid a one-dimensional definition of true humanity is evident in Davies' prose from his first publications. In the "Samuel Marchbanks" columns, for example, Marchbanks plays the role of an alter-ego for Davies' himself. Davies' describes this role assigned to

Marchbanks when he has his protagonist say about Davies:

> He is inclined to be moderate
> in pretty nearly everything;
> I regard moderation as a sign
> of physical or intellectual
> weakness. He is just about
> everything which I detest; I
> am everything which he fears
> and seeks to avoid.
> 10

Human beings are never, for Davies, what they seem. Beneath every obvious character trait, there lurks a shadow. In The Manticore, David Staunton recalls Ramsay's description of Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King:

> I remember Ramsay saying, "You'd
> better face it, Boy; Mackenzie
> King rules Canada because he
> himself is the embodiment of
> Canada--cold and cautious on
> the outside, dowdy and pussy
> in every overt action, but
> inside a mass of intuition and
> dark intimations. King is Destiny's
> child. He will probably always
> do the right thing for the
> wrong reasons."
> 11

In The Rebel Angels, Maria expresses a similar sentiment when she wonders "what it was like to be one of those smiling, pale-skinned, and often pale-eyed Canadian mothers, whose outward pleasantness so often enclosed a hard and narrow
12
spirit."

Wholeness in the human can only be perceived if one is aware of both the outward face and the inward shadow. Wholeness also consists in resisting the temptation to resolve the paradox implied in a personality which contains two sides. In The Manticore, Dr. von Haller explains to David Staunton:

>   To banish your Shadow would be
>   of no pyschological service to
>   you. Can you imagine a man without
>   a Shadow? Do you know Chamisso's
>   story of Peter Schlemihl? No?
>   He sold his shadow to the Devil,
>   and he was miserable ever after.
>   No, no; your Shadow is one of
>   the things that keeps you in
>   balance. But you must recognize
>   him, you know, your Shadow. He
>   is not such a terrible fellow if
>   you know him. He is not lovable;
>   he is quite ugly. But accepting
>   this ugly creature is needful if
>   you are really looking for
>   psychological wholeness.
>   13

Davies' attachment to the acceptance of duality in the

personality to human wholeness is consistent with his

attraction to Jung. Jung held strongly to the notion that

any attempt to deny or to suppress the shadow is to retreat

from being human. Patricia Monk comments:

>   Jung was under no illusions about
>   human nature: "man is not fundamentally
>   good, almost half of him is a devil,"
>   but that "almost half" cannot be ignored
>   because "mere suppression of the
>   shadow is as little of a remedy as
>   beheading would be for a headache."
>   14

Jung's identification of the shadow with the devilish "almost

half" of the human raises an interesting question regarding

his (and Davies') understanding of the dualism within the

human and that espoused in gnostic literature.

     ii. The shadow as the dark side

     Both Jung and Davies express an affinity to gnosticism.

A part of this affinity would seem to involve parallel

understandings of the human psyche. At the most basic level

it would be true to say Jung and Davies would be harmonious

with the gnostic spirit in the sense that they do not limit

the psyche to that part which is influenced and formed by the immediate social environment. Jung's respect for the "collective unconscious" and Davies' inclusion of a mythic world in the development of his characters point to an anthropology in which surface appearances never provide sufficient data to understand the whole person.

When one looks at the specific ways in which this paradoxical understanding of humanity is expressed in Davies' writing some important distinctions between his anthropology and that of the ancient gnostics emerge.

In gnostic literature the paradox is expressed in a straight forward manner. A divine spark is trapped in a corrupt and evil body. In other words, that which is hidden is good and that which is concrete and visible is evil.

This particular dynamic does find expression in Davies' novels. In <u>World of Wonders</u>, for example, Liesl, the ugly woman who possesses a capacity for gentleness, makes reference to the Magian World View of Oswald Spengler. Spengler, the twentieth century German philosopher of history, critiqued linear interpretations of history and advocated a notion of cultural cyles which, when understood, enable one to predetermine the course of a particular historical period. The cycle which interests Liesl is the one characterized by the Middle Ages. In her description of this world view, gnostic themes emerge:

> It was a sense of the unfathomable
> wonder of the invisible world that
> existed side by side with a hard
> recognition of the roughness

and cruelty and day-to-day
demands of the tangible world.
It was a readiness to see
demons where nowadays we see
neuroses, and to see the hand
of a guardian angel in what we
are apt to shrug off ungrate-
fully as a stroke of luck. It
was religion, but a religion
with a thousand gods, none of
them all-powerful and most of
them ambiguous in their
attitude toward man. It was
poetry and wonder which might
reveal themselves in the
dunghill, and it was an
understanding of the dunghill
that lurks in poetry and
wonder. It was a sense of
living in what Spengler called
a quivering cavern-light
which is always in danger of
being swallowed up in the
surrounding, impenetrable darkness.
                                        15

This description is personalized in the characters of Liesl

and Eisengrim. Their lives are marked by the cruelty of the

tangible world. Their personalities are shaped by the

struggle with the world with the result that they frequently

exhibit the characteristics of those who have "put on the

beast". Eisengrim is even described as being wolfish in
           16
character.   Out of these characters hardened by the world

emerges poetry and wonder. Like the gnostic revealer clothed

in the world, they carry within them the vision of another

side.

     In the characters for whom life has been harsh, a

gnostic model for the paradox found within their being does

seem appropriate. Davies' protagonists do not, however, all

fall into this category. Those characters more closely

allied with the contemporary world of small town North

American culture do not possess the same affinity to Spengler's description of the medieval world as do the counter-cultural figures such as Liesl and Eisengrim (John Parlabane of The Rebel Angels could be included in this group). The worlds, of Salterton, Deptford, Blairlogie and the University of Toronto, are not perceived by their citizens to be cruel dunghills. Indeed, precisely the opposite is the case.

In a culture shaped by an optimistic view of the world and human history, the dunghill becomes the least appropriate description of the visible part of one's being. The culture of North American Protestantism has been shaped, according to Douglas Hall by an image in which the human person "is a high and noble being, and history is the progressive march toward the realization of his grandeur."[17] In order to maintain this image, the negative parts of existence which would counter the image must be suppressed. D. G. Jones speaks of an Apollonian vision, current in modern society, dedicated to the suppression of all that might tempt us to think of this world as a dunghill:

> For it is one of the problems
> of established culture that it
> has distinguished the world so
> thoroughly into black and white
> and attacked so much of life as
> a darkness, telling us to desire
> only the light. And the Apollonian
> vision and the impulse to over-
> power the past lends itself only
> too easily to an excessive and
> at times almost paranoiac desire
> for light: the desire to analyse
> it into a series of rational
> elements that can then be dealt
> with systematically by a series

> of rational techniques, so that
> man can control life as it were
> from the outside, rather than
> participate in it. Then, whatever
> is dark, if it cannot be eliminated
> in fact, disappears from the
> vocabulary and from consciousness.
> 18

This process identified by Jones in which intimations of darkness in the world are suppressed produces a world view very different from the Magian world described by Spengler and quite opposite to the vision of the world found in gnosticism.

This differing world view produces different assumptions regarding what is obvious and what is hidden in the human person. In a world perceived to be dark, it is the light which must be uncovered. In a world which proclaims itself to be filled the light of human progress, it is the dark side of reality which lies concealed within the individual. Jung's identification of the shadow with the devilish part of our being makes sense in the modern era in which the Enlightenment and doctrines of human progress have shaped human self-perception. To identify the shadow with the dark side becomes even more appropriate in the North American context where the horrors of the latter part of the twentieth century have not had the same critical impact upon the modern image of human reality, as has been the case in other parts of the world.

Davies' world found in Deptford and the other towns of his fiction contains this modern (and, particularly, North American) desire to suppress the darkness. David Staunton in The Manticore is portrayed as a child of the Apollonian

vision in which order overcomes chaos and in which dark impulses are repressed. David's refusal to recognize the hidden part of himself leads to psychic illness. In his therapy with Dr. von Haller, his encounter with the Shadow becomes an important part of the process. This encounter reaches its climax, however, not in therapy with von Haller but, rather, in an experience with Liesl. Liesl takes David to caves associated with ancient religious practises. When David becomes frightened of the darkness in the caves he cries out, "'But for the love of God let's get back to the light.'" Liesl responds,"'For the love of God? Is not God to be found in the darkness? Well, you mighty lover of the light and the law, away we go.'"[19] The gnostic images of light and dark are inverted in David. What is not inverted is the sense that the experienced world is not real. For the light of David's world is not similar to the hidden light of the gnostic. The light of David's world does not point to a divine genesis. It is, rather, a contrived, manufactured light intended to obscure rather than illumine reality.

This image of light portrayed in The Manticore is characterized, in other places, by the notion of pure goodness. John Parlabane's experience with a religious order, "The Society of the Sacred Mission", exposes him to a world in which the moral dimension of light is promoted to the exclusion of any other possibility:

> The Society offered a good life,
> but that was precisely the
> trouble--it was so unremittingly
> good. I had known another

world, and I became positively
                    sick for the existential gloom,
                    the malicious joy at the misfortunes
                    of others, and the gallows-humour
                    that gave zest to modern
                    intellectual life outside the
                    monastery. I was like a
                    child who is given nothing but
                    the most wholesome food; my
                    soul yearned for unwholesome
                    trash, to keep me somehow
                    in balance.
                                    20

Parlabane abandons the monastery because, in its quest for

pure goodness, it loses that balance that comes in living

with the paradox of light (or goodness) in tension with dark

(or evil).

iii. Differing goals: paradox and resolution

The fact that this tension is accepted by both Jung and

Davies as integral to a whole life points to another

difference between ancient gnosticism and the gnostic spirit

embodied in contemporary figures such as Jung and Davies.

The human paradox reflected in the presense of divine light

in a corrupt body is not, in gnostic systems, a natural

state. The eschatology of gnostic thought assumes a

resolution of the paradox. Kurt Rudolph refers to the vivid

descriptions in the literature (particularly the Mandean

literature) in which the soul, freed from the body, ascends

to an original home. This ascent implies the destruction of

the dualism created by the descent from the Godhead:

                    The laying aside of the body is
                    for Gnosis not only tantamount
                    to a release of the "soul" but
                    is equally a judgement against
                    the forces which created the body.
                    It is a victory for the world

> of light and heralds the final
> destruction of darkness.[21]

In Davies' novels the knowledge of the paradox is an end in

itself. Just as Davies does not share ancient gnosticism's

negative valuation of creation, so Davies does not adhere to

a denouement in which creation is destroyed. Even the

repressive parts of creation such as Deptford do not come to

an end. Rather, they are put into perspective and held in

balance with the places where spiritual adventures are

possible.

C. The Nature of Evil in Gnostic Thought

The contrast between an ancient gnostic understanding of

the dualistic nature of human existence and that espoused by

Davies in his novels is reflected in the attitudes toward the

dark side of the paradox found in gnosticism and in Davies'

writing.

The evolutionary development of evil espoused by the

Syrian branch of gnosticism (the branch reflected in

Valentinianism and most of the Christian gnostic systems)

moves naturally into the eschatology of gradual restoration

of the fallen light. The resolved paradox implicit in such

an eschatology means that evil lacks a substantive quality.

Walker describes the nature of evil in these systems:

> In the occidental (Alexandrian,
> Palestinian, Syrian) theory, which
> is the one commonly held by gnostics,
> it is believed that evil is not
> an intrinsic or absolute quality
> in itself. On the contrary, it
> is a privative condition, arising
> out of the absence or attenuation
> of the divine qualities. Thus,
> evil is the natural consequence

> of the descent of the emanations,
> so that as the emanations recede
> from the primary divine source
> there is a progressive dimunition
> in their goodness and light.
>   22

To perceive evil as the absence of divinity is to imagine the
conflict between good and evil in cosmic rather than human
terms. The definition of evil lacks the moral implications
present in orthodox Judaism and Christianity. Evil is not
defined in the context of inter-personal relationships or
even in the context of divine-human relationships (which,
because of the unknowability of God, are impossible without
escape from humanity itself). Elaine Pagels argues that the
gnostics defined evil in terms of the anxieties connected
with being human:

> The Greek term kakia (like
> the English term "ill-ness")
> originally meant "what is bad"--
> what one desires to avoid, such
> as physical pain, sickness,
> suffering, misfortune, every
> kind of harm. When followers
> of Valentinus asked about the
> source of kakia, they referred
> to emotional harm--fear,
> confusion, grief. According
> to the Gospel of Truth, the
> process of self-discovery begins
> as a person experiences the
> "anguish and terror" of the
> human condition, as if lost in
> a fog or haunted in sleep by
> terrifying nightmares.
>   23

The experiences of these terrors are first felt in the body.
Valentinus claims that the gnostic's first steps toward
redemption occur as a result of the realization of the
temporality of the body. The association of emotional terror
with the body and the realization that the body is ultimately

destroyed lead to the identification of the body with what is bad. Combatting evil corresponds to escaping from the body.

Pagels argues that this notion of evil lends itself to a solitary perception of the human journey. Because the definition of evil does not contain a social dimension, the responsibility for the resolution of evil becomes an individual concern. This individualism finds expression in a saying from "The Gospel of Thomas": "Jesus said, 'Blessed are the solitary and elect, for you will find the Kingdom. For you are from it, and to it you will return.'"[24] The body and its earthly home do not contain the resources for salvation. Thus, communal relationships in the sphere of creation similarly have no value insofar as the discovery of the true self is concerned. The resolution of the paradox of light and darkness is lodged with the individual as he or she moves away from all earthly connections and towards the Light.

i. The human expression of evil: ignorance

When evil is defined as an absence of divinity rather than as the intentional breaking of relational bonds, then the description of the human condition under such a conception of evil is marked by the term ignorance, rather than sin. The evolutionary dualism of the Syrian-Egyptian version of gnosticism envisions a descent toward creation in which the light becomes increasingly dim. Creation itself represents the lowest and darkest level of this descent. The children of creation, by their nature, established by this descent from the Light, perceive no evidence of the Light in

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their earthly environment. They are ignorant of that from which they have descended. Jonas claims that this ignorance takes on a metaphysical quality:

> And it is the Syrian-Egyptian type
> which, with its subtle and more
> intriguing deductive task, is
> not only more ambitious speculatively
> and more differentiated psychologically
> than the rigid Iranian type of
> dualism but also the one of the
> two which can do full systematic
> justice to the redemptional claim
> of gnosis so central to gnostic
> religion: this, because its
> opposite, "ignorance' as a
> divine event is accorded a
> metaphysical role in the very
> origination of the cosmos and in
> sustaining the dualistic situation
> as such.
> 25

The Light and Darkness images in gnostic dualism find expression in the presence of ignorance or gnosis in the individual. The solitary journey of the gnostic is one which moves away from ignorance and toward gnosis.

The ignorance which characterizes the condition of humankind is not benign. The metaphors for ignorance employed in gnostic writing indicate an element of volition in the maintenance of a state of ignorance. Sleep, as a metaphor for ignorance, is not a state of being which simply occurs. Rather, it is seen to be desired. In a Mandean hymn, a messenger of light speaks to the soul. In one section of the hymn, sleep is seen to be desired: "Because you loved dreams and phantoms, you will sink into the
26
cauldron, as it seethes." Drunkenness as a metaphor for ignorance also carries with it some sense of willful action

on the part of the one who has been drunk. In "The Gospel of Truth" act of drinking to excess must be abandoned in order to start the journey toward the true self:

> He who is to have knowledge in
> this manner knows where he comes
> from and where he is going. He
> knows as one who having become
> drunk has turned away from his
> drunkenness, (and) having returned
> to himself, has set right what
> are his own.
> 27

Sleep and drunkenness are chosen forms of ignorance which make it clear "that ignorance is not a neutral state, the mere absence of knowledge, but is itself a positive counter-condition to that of knowledge, actively induced and maintained to prevent it."[28] This active ignorance must be countered by the awakening call of the revealer if one is to experience ignorance's opposite, _gnosis_.

ii. The contrast with orthodoxy

In the substitution of ignorance for sin the divergence of gnosticism from orthodoxy is clear. Jonas points out that this divergence is particulary evident in gnostic interpretations of Christology and soteriology:

> Since the gnostic concept of salvation
> has nothing to do with the remission
> of sin ("sin" itself having no place
> in gnostic doctrine, which puts
> "ignorance" in its place), there is
> in the savior's descent nothing of
> vicarious suffering, of atonement as
> a condition of divine forgiveness,
> and, with the one exception of Marcion,
> nothing even of a ransom by which
> the captive souls have to be brought
> back. Rather, the idea is either that
> of a technical necessity imposed by
> the conditions of the mission...or that

> of a ruse by which the Archons are to
> be deceived.[29]

Sin, in the orthodox sense, is countered by redemption and reconciliation. The essential goodness of creation allows this to be experienced in the midst of human existence. Ignorance, on the other hand, can only be countered by gnosis. The essential fallenness of creation does not allow this to be experienced in the midst of human existence. Gnosis, the antidote to ignorance, must be experienced beyond existence in the pre-historic realm or in the remnant of the cosmic light to be found in the inner self. For Christian orthodoxy, salvation from sin is found in an essentially this-worldly context. For gnosticism, salvation from ignorance is set in an essentially other-worldly context.

D. Davies' Understanding of Evil

i. Recognition of evil

Robertson Davies has expressed frustration with what he perceives to be the response of Christian orthodoxy to the problem of evil. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Davies characterizes the orthodox approach to evil as one in which there is a great deal of talk, "but evil is always the other thing: it is something which is apart from perfection, and man's duty is to strive for perfection."[30]

This attitude toward orthodoxy's treatment of evil is reflected in Davies' fiction. In World of Wonders, Ramsay speaks of the stories which involve saints and dragons. In his interpretation, the dragons represent the shadow of the saint: "it doesn't take much penetration to know that the

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dragons represent not simply evil in the world but their [the saints] personal evil, as well."[31]   Ramsay says that he doubts the claim that the saints killed their dragons. He uses, as evidence of his doubt, the pictures of St. George and St. Catherine with their dragons on chains. His doubt also reflects his conviction that if the dragons had been killed, it would have destroyed the paradoxical persona which makes the saint human:

> But I am strongly of the opinion
> that St. George and St. Catherine
> did not kill those dragons, for
> then they would have been wholly
> good, and inhuman, and useless
> and probably great sources of
> mischief, as one-sided people
> always are. No, they kept the
> dragons as pets.[32]

In this passage, Davies re-iterates his conviction that maintaining the paradoxical relationship between one's outward self and the shadow, between good and evil, is essential to human health. In this conviction he sees himself running counter to Christian tradition. In a sarcastic comment on the saint's keeping the dragons as pets, Ramsay says:

> Because they were Christians,
> and because Christianity enjoins
> us to seek only the good and
> to have nothing whatever to do
> with evil, they doubtless rubbed
> it into the dragons that it was
> uncommonly broadminded and decent
> of them to let the dragons
> live at all.[33]

In The Rebel Angels, the resistance of conventional religion to the duality of light and dark in the human personality is revealed in Simon Darcourt's romantic reflections on Maria

Theotoky. Darcourt sees Maria as an incarnation of the
fallen Sophia, possessing both earthiness and the capacity to
redeem. This image, Darcourt reflects, is foreign to his
religious milieu: "For me Maria was wholeness, the glory and
gift of God and also the dark earth as well, so foreign to
the conventional Christian mind."[34]

Davies' advocacy of the importance of recognizing evil
is consistent with Jung's conviction that it is the
unexamined life, rather than evil itself, which presents a
danger to human wholeness. Patricia Monk describes Jung's
position in this way:

> To succumb to good is to act
> without examining it, as though
> it were the only possibility,
> and good, if unexamined, turns
> to evil....On the level of
> the personal unconscious, the
> unexamined side of psychic
> life is represented by the
> archetype of the shadow.[35]

This conscious openness to the shadow represents, for Davies,
a rejection of an orthodoxy which he perceives to prefer
repression rather than the recognition of evil.

ii. Davies' critique of orthodoxy regarding evil

Davies claims that the recognition of evil and the
willingness to take it seriously distinguishes his characters
from the representatives of orthodox Christianity who
surround them. In relation to the culture out of which
Davies writes, there are grounds for this claim. The English
culture of North America is rooted in the Enlightenment and
the Age of Progress. As such it exhibits a strong bias

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toward metaphors of light and away from metaphors of

darkness. The dominant religion of this culture has tended

to adopt this bias. In <u>Lighten Our Darkness</u>, Douglas Hall

refers to this phenomenon in his description of the official

religion of an optimistic society. Referring to humankind's

desire to gain mastery over the earth in the modern era, he

says:

> Is man <u>good</u> enough to master
> the earth? The question was not
> raised. If that question had been
> raised with sufficient seriousness
> by Christians at the outset of
> the modern epoch, it is possible
> that we should not today have
> come to the conclusion that
> nature's greatest problem is
> man-the-master.
>   Instead, the doctrine of
> sin was dispensed with as quickly
> and quietly as possible.
>   36

Hall goes on to argue that the concept of sin did not

disappear altogether from contemporary Christian thought. It

is, rather, reduced to a domesticated state defined by either

a pietistic privatism or a secularized notion of personal

immorality. When Davies claims that the Christian community

experienced in contemporary North America does not take evil

seriously, he is right in the sense that sin as a part of the

human condition has been downplayed when it has been seen as

an impediment to human progress.

What is missing in Davies' critique of orthodoxy is the

recognition that the resources to counter the neglect of evil

found in popular religion in North America are not only found

outside the bounds of orthodoxy. Within the orthodox

tradition, the reality of evil can be and, historically, is

taken seriously. In his commentary on North American

Christianity, Hall counters the attempt of that version of

Christianity to possess light without darkness with what he

calls a "thin tradition" within Christian theology:

> What follows is written in the
> conviction that at least there
> has been in Christian history
> a thin tradition which tried to
> proclaim the possibility of hope
> without shutting its eyes to the
> data of despair, a tradition
> which indeed insisted that
> authentic hope comes into view
> only in the midst of apparent
> hopelessness and probably over
> against what announces itself
> as hope in a given society.
> 37

Hall chooses as exemplars of this thin tradition (thin, in

the sense that it has never been dominant in Christendom)

Martin Luther, Soren Kieregaard and Karl Barth. These three

figures, coming from different eras in the history of the

western church, are all representatives of a theology which

would take the reality of the cross as a symbol of the human

darkness as essential to an understanding of Christian faith.

For Luther, theologia crucis stood as a necessary alternative

to a theologia gloriae which, represented in Luther's time by

Scholasticism and papal Christendom, promised humankind an

access, through reason and good works, to the power and glory

of God. In theologia gloriae, the irrational power of evil

and the reality of inexplicable suffering are tamed. Luther

found in the tradition of the cross (particularly Paul's

interpretation of that tradition) a theological position

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which did not trivialize the Darkness he knew to be real.
Luther writes:

> (20) He deserves to be called a
> theologian, however who
> comprehends the visible and
> manifest things of God seen
> through suffering and the cross.
> (21) A theology of glory calls
> evil good and good evil. A
> theology of the cross calls the
> thing what it actually is.
>   38

Kierkegaard inherits the theology of the cross and, in
his nineteenth century context, casts it in the language of
existential despair. Against a contemporary church which
proclaims an unreal message of light and glory, Kierkegaard
posits a faith which takes with utmost seriousness the
feelings of meaninglessness in the face of a world which
seems absurd. God, incarnate through Christ on the cross, is
in the midst of this abyss. Hall comments:

> The point is, Christianity as
> Kierkegaard understands it is
> a catalyst which awakens man
> to the real despair, danger and
> ignominy of his existence. It
> begins with the exposure of a
> human being to the abyss over
> which his life is suspended--and
> though it does not end there,
> it causes him to live always
> with the consciousness of that
> abyss......Only in the darkness
> does the faith that sees beyond
> darkness become a possibility...
>   39

In his description of the third exemplar, Karl Barth,
Hall speaks of the ways in which Barth stands over against a
theology of comfortable theism:

> Theism of the sort presupposed
> in most Anglo-Saxon Christianity--
> this pervasive, somehow natural
> and overall comfortable sense of

> the Divine--has never had difficulty
> overcoming the cross: the cross
> of Jesus or the cross of man.
>   40

In the version of Christianity characterized by comfortable

Theism, the dialectic between good and evil loses a sense of

intensity or immediacy in the culture. The negative side of

the dialectic (characterized, in the modern era, by the

combination of suffering and a sense of meaninglessness) is

devalued and, thereby, repressed. The theology of Barth,

along with that of Luther and Kierkegaard, stands in

opposition to this interpretation of Christian faith:

> Like Luther and Kierkegaard,
> Barth wishes to avoid theological
> solutions to life's questions
> which could only be received
> at the expense of truth about
> the world. The theology of the
> cross is committed to calling
> the thing what it really is.
> It must correspond with reality.
> It is better to lose something
> of the positive Christian
> message than to lose touch with
> the negative in which we really
> participate.
>   41

In the face of the version of the Christian message which, in

Davies' eyes, seems unable to come to terms with the reality

of evil, these theologians (along with others) emerge from

the annals of Christian orthodoxy as ones whose theological

enterprise is centered on the maintenance of a dialectic in

which suffering and evil are taken so seriously that they are

embodied in the primary symbol of the tradition--the cross.

The recognition of the existence of a critique of the

"Official Religion of the Officially Optimistic Society"

coming from within Christian orthodoxy itself leads to a

question regarding the relationship between this critique and the counter-cultural religious notions of Davies' protagonists. Is there, in other words, an essential similarity between Davies' resistance to a religion which does not take the reality of evil seriously and the protests of Luther, Kiekegaard and Barth against a religion which does not take the theology of the cross seriously? Is there any affinity between Davies' attraction to the gnostic emphasis on the hiddenness of light and the admonition on the part of those in the "thin tradition" that the light of hope is only seen from the perspective of the darkness?

It might seem, at first glance, that very little exists to distinguish the critique of one-dimensional Christianity found in Davies' novels from that part of the orthodox Protestant tradition which would argue against a faith which wants only light and glory. Both Davies and the theologians would posit the experiential reality of evil. Both adhere to the notion that the repression of that reality leads to inauthenticity--for Davies, an inauthentic life; for the theologians, an inauthentic faith.

The difference between what Davies is saying in his novels and what is being said in the critique of optimistic religion by the theologian in the orthodox tradition rests not in that which is being attacked but, rather, in their respective understandings of that which is to be upheld. Davies is concerned with the repression of the dark shadow. The theologian fights against the denial of the reality of the cross. In both cases, there is a call for the darkness

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to be recognized and taken seriously. The noticeable

difference between the novelist and the theologian comes over

the question of the definition of the darkness which is to be

taken seriously. The dark shadow found in Davies' characters

and the cross of Christian faith are not synonymous.

iii. The devil metaphor

The exploration of the difference between the dark

shadow and the cross begins with an examination of one of

Davies' most frequent metaphors for the dark side--the devil.

Davies' use of the devil as a symbol for the darkness which

must be encountered on the road to human wholeness is

consistent with his deliberate choice of words and symbols

which have gone out of fashion in the context out of which he

is writing. The use of the devil metaphor helps to emphasize

the fact that he is attempting to counter cultural

repressions. His use of the devil is also consistent with

his attraction to the images used by Jung in his psychology.

In his Seven Sermons to the Dead, Jung explores gnostic

themes in a style similar to that of the gnostic tractates.

One theme developed by Jung is that of the Devil in relation

to God. He envisions God and the Devil as constant

opposites: "All things which are brought forth from the

Pleroma by differentiation are pairs of opposites; therefore

God always has with him the Devil."[42] For Jung, the

significance of the close dialectic connection between God

and the Devil is to be found in what it says about the human

personality. The constant tension between God and the Devil

is lived out in the inner self: "This relationship is so

close, as you have learned, it is so indissoluable in your

own lives, that it is even as the Pleroma itself."[43]   In his

commentary on the Seven Sermons to the Dead, Stephan Hoeller

speaks of the importance of this image of the co-existing God

and Devil for the human psyche:

> In the Second Sermon Jung is
> concerned with the existence
> of a primal dichotomy within the
> psyche, a dichotomy which is
> united by a mysterious reconciling
> power of existential activity,
> named by Jung on the Basilidian
> model as Abraxas. The two
> polar deities of God and Devil
> are definite, because they force
> human beings to endure psychic
> conflict and to make painful
> decisions.[44]

For Jung this dichotomy in the psyche represented by God and

the Devil does not occur on a linear plane:

> Rather they might be said to
> resemble a circle wherein going
> far enough in either direction
> is likely to associate one with
> the opposite polarity. As Jung
> himself phrased it, in the
> last resort there is no good
> that cannot produce evil, and
> no evil that cannot produce good.[45]

This image is contrasted with a type of religion which

envisions good and evil as opposing poles. In this concept,

one is able to move progressively away from one pole toward

the other. With Jung's circle one cannot turn his or her

back on either God or the Devil.

The role played by the Devil in Jung's psychology bears

a close resemblance to the role assumed in Davies' novels.

The role is intimately tied to the inner life of the

protagonists. Patricia Monk comments: "Davies, as we have
seen, considers the devil to be 'not the commonplace symbol
of evil but the symbol of unconsciousness....'"[46] In the
quest for wholeness, Davies' characters are enjoined to
embrace their personal devils. When Liesl admonishes Ramsay
to examine the unlived side of his life, she uses the
metaphor of the devil:

> "But every man has a devil, and a
> man of unusual quality, like
> yourself, Ramsay, has an unusual
> devil. You must get to know your
> personal devil.....Why don't you
> shake hands with your devil, Ramsay,
> and change this foolish life of
> yours? Why don't you, just for
> once, do something inexplicable,
> irrational, at the devil's bidding,
> and just for the hell of it?
> You would be a different man."[47]

The devil theme is explored further in World of Wonders when
Ramsay explains to Eisengrim that he has become fascinated by
the attributes of the devil:

> "I am simply trying to get a
> better hold on his [the Devil's]
> attributes. The attributes of
> God have been very carefully
> explored. But the Devil's
> attributes have been left
> vague. I think I've found
> one of them. It is he who
> puts the prices on things."[48]

Eisengrim responds to Ramsay's reflections on the devil by
commenting that he has become a theologian. When Ramsay
replies that he is, rather, a diabologian ("It's a fairly
clear field, these days.") Eisengrim expresses a word of
caution:

> Do you think you can study evil

without living it? How are you
                    going to discover the attributes
                    of the Devil without getting
                    close to him? Are you the man
                    for that? Don't bother your
                    old grey head, Dunny."
                                        49

In both passages the devil is related to the personal

struggle for an integrated psyche. The devil's primary venue

is the inner self. The locating of the symbol of darkness--

the devil--in the midst of a psychic drama reveals a bias

with regard to the nature of evil on Davies' part.

    It is a conception of evil which is close to that of the

gnostics. In the gnostic ethos the world is identified

totally with the darkness. One of the implications of this

belief is that the struggle between light and darkness is not

perceived to have anything to do with social relationships

or social structures. Such relationships and structures are

identified with the evil creation and, as such, do not carry

the potential for embodying the dialectic between light and

darkness. Because the light is found beyond human history

either in the cosmos or in the inner self, the tension

between darkness and light does not occur in history.

    While Davies does not share the gnostic's negative

perception of creation, he does demonstrate a bias toward

casting the dualism of light and darkness in a psychological

rather than sociological mode. The devil's role in his

novels is oriented toward the psychic growth of his

individual characters rather than the transformation of

social structures. Like the gnostics, Davies' orientation

with regard to human self-understanding is essentially

individualistic. Like the gnostics, the social structures of Davies' world--the small town, the church, the school and the nation--are often perceived to be a part of what inhibits growth in the individual.

iv. The individualism of evil in Davies' novels

An individualistic interpretation of the dialectic between light and dark marks the contrast between Davies' gnostic vision of the struggle and the theology which emerges from the theologia crucis tradition of Christian orthodoxy. The theology of the cross can be viewed as an expression of individual piety:

> Combined with individualism and
> otherworldly pietism, as it has
> been frequently enough, the theology
> of the cross can breed that posture
> of knowing pity which shakes its
> head mournfully at every attempt
> of man to better his condition,
> and scorns all dreamers. It is
> never surprised by evil.
> 50

The social conservatism of Martin Luther adds weight to the notion that theologia crucis can lead to an individualism as profound as that prompted by gnosticism. Douglas Hall, however, raises the important question as to whether or not the very real temptation to privatize theological insights is inherent in the theology of the cross. Hall suggests that when the cross is viewed within the context of incarnation, the tendency toward pietism is challenged. The message of the incarnation is that God enters into human history. The cross, as a part of the incarnational experience, is God entering into human suffering. The suffering of the cross into which God enters is both personal and relational. The

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individual, religious structures, political structures, the
mob and God are all intertwined in the story of the cross.
The incarnational understanding of the cross leads to an
ethic which breaks the boundaries of individual piety. Hall
comments:

> The point of departure for the
> ethic of the cross is not
> merely an axiom, a lesson, an
> insight; it is not merely the
> concept that God's work in the
> world always reflects creation
> out of nothing, the resurrection
> of the dead, the justification
> of the unrighteous. The point
> of departure is rather the subjection
> of the Christian and the Christian
> koinonia to the experience of the
> cross.....the point of departure
> for <u>this</u> social ethic may be
> the <u>only</u> one that is finally
> legitimate, even in terms that
> secular men, such as Marxists,
> can recognize: namely, <u>a real</u>
> <u>solidarity</u> <u>with</u> <u>those</u> <u>who</u> <u>suffer</u>.
> [51]

The theology of the cross implies a relationship between a
suffering God and suffering humanity. The separation of
humanity and the Godhead into distinct camps of darkness and
light--central to a gnostic understanding of the dialectic--
is broken down in the theology of the cross. God and
humanity share in the reality of good and evil. The neglect
of the social dimension of suffering which comes when
everything human is seen to be completely separated from the
Light is, similarly broken down in a theology of the cross.
God shares in human suffering in all its aspects--personal
and corporate.

This understanding of the theology of the cross is pronounced in the theological movements of this century. What moves Karl Barth to a study of Romans and Paul's cross theology is the reality of human suffering in the First World War. Reinhold Niebuhr's experiences of the social problems of working class Detroit lead him in a similar path. More recently, the systemic poverty and injustice in Latin America have led to the liberation theologies which take God's participation in human suffering seriously.

The notion of evil represented in the theology of the cross in its various forms differs from the picture of the dark side found in Davies' novels in two connected respects. The corporate dimension of human suffering stressed by contemporary proponents of the theology of the cross gets little recognition in the psychic drama of the interplay between two sides of the human personality. The social structures of Davies' novels exist as representations of that which must be overcome in the individual. Referring to these structures, Liesl says to Ramsay, "That horrid village and your hateful Scots family made you a moral monster."[52] In Ramsay's encounter with his personal devil there is no suggestion that these structures of family and community will be affected. The recognition of the shadow results in a personal transformation represented in Liesl's statement to Ramsay that, "it is not too late for you to enjoy a few years of almost normal humanity."[53] With the focus of transformation on the personal life, political structures exist as backdrops to the individual struggle with the shadow

rather than as an integral part of the struggle. Thus, when
Ramsay asks Liesl to keep the secret of Paul Dempster's
premature birth, she phrases her response using the images of
national realities but without implying any involvement in
change: "Now, tell me how you are going to get the infant
Magnus Eisengrim out of that dreadful Canada and into a
country where big spiritual adventures are possible."[54]   The
nation is a static entity whose only role is to provide
symbols for the drama going on in the inner self.

One of the effects of lodging the paradoxical
relationship of darkness and light in the inner self is the
loss of a strong sense of the social dimension of evil. This
loss is revealed in Davies' treatment of his primary metaphor
of darkness--the devil. When Ramsay describes to Padre
Blazon his encounter with the devil in the person of Liesl,
there is a benign quality to his description and to Blazon's
reply:

> "The Devil proved to be a very
> good fellow. He suggested that
> a little compromise would not
> hurt me. He even suggested that
> an acquaintance with Him might
> improve my character."
>   [Blazon replied,]"I find
> no fault with that. The Devil
> knows corners of us all of which
> Christ Himself is ignorant.
> Indeed, I am sure Christ learned
> a great deal that was salutary
> about Himself when He met the
> Devil in the wilderness....On
> the whole, we treat the Devil
> shamefully, and the worse we
> treat Him the more He laughs
> at us.
>   [55]

This image of the devil as a prodder of human consciousness

is characterized by cleverness and wit. In _World of Wonders_, the devil is described as "a very clever fellow."[56] Later in the novel, Ramsay wonders "if humour isn't one of the most brilliant inventions of the Devil."[57] In these descriptions an image of the devil emerges which is dominated by his role as a mischief maker in the human psyche and a counter to the sobriety and morality of conventional living. The horrors engendered by human actions in the world do not seem to enter into the definition of the devil. Even when Ramsay, in _World of Wonders_, ponders the relationship of the devil to the external world of human suffering, the examples of suffering chosen are natural and not the result of human sin:

> What about evil, then? Is the
> devil the origin and ruler of
> that great realm of manifestly
> dreadful and appalling things
> which are not, so far as we can
> determine, anybody's fault or
> the consequences of any sin?
> Of the cancer wards, and the
> wards for children born
> misshapen and mindless?...
> These are evil things within
> my knowledge: I am certain
> there are worse things I have
> never encountered. And how
> constant this evil is! Let
> mankind laboriously suppress
> leprosy and tuberculosis
> rages: when tuberculosis is
> chained, cancer rushes to take
> its place. One might almost
> conclude that such evils were
> necessities of our collective
> life.[58]

The world of disease can involve terrible suffering and when Ramsay contemplates the possibility that the devil might be responsible, he does admit that that would make him "a

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serious adversary indeed."   Such possibilities, however, do
not have much effect on the central role which the devil
plays in bringing wholeness to the individual. There, the
issue is one of the devil's relationship to personal self-
consciousness and not to the calamities that afflict the
world. If the notion of the devil as the agent of natural
catastrophe does not seem to be important in the role he
plays in Davies' novels, even less important is the
relationship of the devil to the systemic evil of the world.
The novels make no mention of Auschwitz, Hiroshima or any of
the other symbols of corporate evil in the modern world.
This is not surprising. In the face of such horrors,
references to the metaphor of evil--the devil--as a "clever
fellow" or an "inventer of humour" would be hopelessly
inadequate as responses to evil in the world. It is only
when evil is restricted to the personal level that the devil
can be invested with qualities that seem almost endearing.

The contemporary theologians of the cross use metaphors
for evil which take account of the social dimension of evil.
For Douglas Hall, Auschwitz and Hiroshima are seen as modern
images of the cross. The following quote from the Jewish
novelist, Elie Wiesel, indicates the power of those
metaphors:

> Our generation....is the generation
> of Auschwitz, or of Hiroshima,
> tomorrow's Hiroshima. The future
> frightens us, the past fills us
> with shame: and these two
> feelings, like those two events,
> are closely linked, like cause
> to effect. It is Auschwitz
> that will produce Hiroshima,

> and if the human race should
> perish by the nuclear bomb,
> this will be the punishment
> for Auschwitz, where, in the
> ashes, the hope of man was
> extinguished.
>   60

Hall comments that the religion of the optimistic society

which attempts to suppress negativity, stands "speechless in

the face of the experience of evil"[61] represented by

Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Hiroshima and Auschwitz, because

they represent evil which exists beyond the confires of the

individual psyche, produce a different effect than does the

metaphor of the devil. Both types of metaphors assault the

temptation to suppress evil. Davies' devil, related, as it

is, to individual self-awareness, produces a reaction of

embarrassment in the child of modernity who would like to see

him or herself as basically good. The modern metaphors for

the cr ss such as Auschwitz and Hiroshima, because of the

horror they represent and because they reflect evil beyond

individual control, produce a reaction of silence.

Davies' charge that Christian orthodoxy fails to take

evil seriously is profoundly challenged by the representative

of the "thin tradition"--the tradition of _theologia crucis_--

within orthodoxy. The charge is not only challenged but,

also, turned around and addressed back to Davies. The

gnostic spirit which informs Davies' perception of evil is

limited by its lack of a social dimension. In a world which

is a corrupt creation, Auschwitz and Hiroshima lose any sense

of uniqueness. Good and evil in the social order are

meaningless. The only way in which evil is taken seriously

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is in the way in which the evil world inhibits the individual soul. While Davies does not adopt the gnostic world view, he does adhere to the gnostic notion that evil is encountered primarily on an individual level. Evil is encountered and taken seriously in order to redeem the unlived life of the individual. What is missing from this understanding of evil is a corporate dimension in which systemic evil in the world is encountered and taken seriously in order to discover the possibility of the redemption of the world.

E. The Moral Implications

The absence of a social dynamic implied in the gnostic rejection of the world is accompanied by a lack of concern for mundane morality. Hans Jonas speaks of the absence of a doctrine of virtue in gnosticism as resulting from the notion of a negative creation:

> The absence of a doctrine of virtue
> in gnostic teaching is connected with
> the anti-cosmic attitude, that is,
> the denial of any worth to the things
> of this world and consequently also
> to man's doings in this world.
> 62

This lack of concern for morality in relation to human interaction in the world could lead in one of two directions. Libertinism and asceticism, though opposites, are both natural outcomes of the anti-cosmic bias of gnosticism. Jonas comments:

> Libertinism had its alternative
> in asceticism. Opposite as the
> two types of conduct are, they
> yet were in the gnostic case
> of the same root. and the same
> basic argument supports them
> both. The one repudiates allegiance
> to nature through excess, the

> other, through abstention. Both
> are lives outside the mundane
> norms. Freedom by abuse and
> freedom by non-use, equal in
> their indiscriminateness, are
> only alternative expressions of
> the same acosmism,
> 63

In terms of the actual practice of the gnostics, the choice

of the ascetic option seems to have been dominant. The

alternative of libertinism, while consistent with gnostic

attitudes toward the world, was probably honoured more in the

slander of the Church Fathers (particularly, Irenaeus) than
64
in actual practice.

These two possibilities--asceticism and libertinism--are

played out in Davies' novels. An asceticism is observed in

the preponderance of bachelor protagonists in the books. In

the Deptford trilogy Dunstan Ramsay, David Staunton and

Magnus Eisengrim are not only unmarried but, also, lead lives

devoid of romantic entanglements. When David Staunton, for

example, goes into therapy in his forties he admits to only
65
one sexual encounter in his life. When Eisengrim has a

sexual relationship with Liesl it is his first with a woman,

despite a career in the more libertine field of the
66
theatre. Simon Darcourt of the Cornish trilogy entertains

a romantic fantasy of Maria (induced, in part, because of her

mythic relationship to Sophia) but, in reality, remains a
67
solitary priest without personal attachments. The quest

for self-knowledge which dominates the characters of these

bachelor figures is accompanied by an ascetic approach to

life.

The libertine option also receives attention from

Davies. The dissolute ex-monk, John Parlabane is, perhaps,

the best representative of this alternative. As a gay man,

Parlabane does not want his homosexuality to be morally

rationalized. He is interested in sex without an attached

relational ethic:

> "I want no truck with Gay
> Liberation or hokum about
> alternative life-styles:
> I want neither the love that
> dare not speak its name nor
> the love that blats its name
> to every grievance committee.
> Gnosce teipsum says the
> Oracle at Delphi; know thyself,
> and I do. I'm just a gross
> old bugger and I like it
> rough--I like the mess and
> the stink. But don't ask me
> to like the people. They
> aren't my kind."
> 68

The libertinism of John Parlabane is not an issue in a milieu

in which self-knowledge rather than moral rectitude is the

important human agenda.

Whether expressed in libertine or ascetic ways, the

morality derived from the gnostic spirit reflects the

individualism of the gnostic understanding of evil. In the

language of ancient gnosticism, morality is not linked to

communal relationships. It is derived, rather, from the need

to escape mundane entanglements. Human action is good only

insofar as it serves to distance one from humanity. In

theory, either libertinism or asceticism can serve this

purpose.

In Davies' novels, morality is tied to the goal of self-

knowledge. Stephen Bonnycastle, in his article, "Robertson

Davies and the Ethics of Monologue," argues that while Davies
does use the language of relationship in the development of
his characters, the dominant thrust in his writing is
centered on the individual. He uses Liesl's designation of
Ramsay as "fifth business" as an example. This designation
can suggest a role in life which involves serving others.
The thrust of the novel, however, would indicate that the
identification of this role serves primarily to serve Ramsay
himself in his quest for self-knowledge. Bonnycastle
comments that "although the principle of relational identity
lies behind many of the most forceful moral statements in the
two books, the relations between characters suggest that they
have absolute identities."[69] The lack of a serious
relational dimension to Davies' concept of evil leads to a
sense of morality which is strongly individualistic in tone.
Davies' treatment of evil in his novels serves as another
mark of the gnostic spirit in his art.

VII. HUMAN DESTINY AND THE INTERRUPTION

OF GNOSIS

VII. Human Destiny and the Interruption of Gnosis

A. The Concept of Fate

The world of the ancient near east is characterized by a sense of an ordered universe in which the activity of humankind is integrally related to the whole. A picture of this conception of the cosmos is revealed in this well-known statement of Plato in the Laws:

> The ruler of the universe has
> ordered all things with a view
> to the excellence and preservation
> of the whole, and each part, as
> far as may be, has an action
> and passion appropriate to it.
> [1]

The part played by humanity may be small in relation to the whole but it, nonetheless, contributes to and is dependent upon the whole:

> And one of these portions of the
> universe is thine own, unhappy man,
> which, however little, contributes
> to the whole: and you do not seem
> to be aware that this and every
> other creation is for the sake of
> the whole, and in order that the life
> of whole may be blessed; and that you
> are created for the sake of the whole
> and not the whole for the sake of
> you.
> [2]

The challenge to the human in this conception of the universe is to perceive the course of his or her life in relation to the orderly movement of the cosmos. Individuals are not independent agents of free will. They are, rather, tied to forces greater than themselves. These forces of the universe are not immediately obvious to the individual. Plato speaks of the human frustration resulting from ignorance with regard

to the relationship between human destiny and the movement of the universe:

> And you are annoyed because you
> are ignorant how what is best for
> you happens to you and to the
> universe, as far as the laws of
> the common creation admit.
>
> 3

What emerges from this sense of an ordered universe which is both greater than and dependent upon its lesser parts and from human ignorance regarding this relationship is the development of the notion of heimarmene--fate. Because we are part of a whole, the movement of our lives must be in accord with the movement of the whole.

This understanding of fate in antiquity is made concrete in astrology. The sensible universe is reflected in the ordering of the heavens. The changes in the course of life on earth corresponds to the changing course of the stars in the heavens.

Gnostic literature comes out of this world of heimarmene and astrology. It posesses its own particular interpretation of these concepts. The cosmos is ordered and does influence the course of earthly existence. The ordering, however, is negative in its intent. The cosmos to which humankind is bound is malignant rather than benign in character. The fate which is implied in an ordered universe of which, humanity is a part is similarly cast. Quoting from the "Papyrus Berolinensis 8502", Kurt Rudolph describes this gnostic version of heimarmene:

> A particularly far-reaching means
> adopted by the darkness to achieve
> its ends is the setting up of the

well-known sidereal power of fate
or Heimarmene. According to our
text it is a creation of the
Demiurge in opposition to the
successful work among men of the
spirit, or of the Epinoia of light
which is identical with it. In
order to gain possession of their
"power of thought", the chief
archon forms a resolve with his
powers: "They caused Heimarmene
to come into being, and with a
measure, times and seasons they
bound the gods of heaven, the
angels, demons and men, that they
might all be in its (Heimarmene's)
fetter and it be lord over them all:
a plan wicked and perverse."
4

In gnosticism, the ordered universe and corresponding fate

takes on the role of that which separates the soul from the

Pleroma. Fate becomes a component part of the earthly prison

in which the soul finds itself trapped. The escape resulting

from gnosis implies a breaking with the course of the cosmos.

Rudolph comments:

The whole world view of late
antiquity, with its idea of
the power of fate (Greek
heimarmene) which dominates
the gods, the world and men, is
here, as it were, bracketed
together and marked with a
negative sign.
5

The astrological reflection of order and fate also

receives a unique gnostic interpretation. In classical Greek

thought the rational movement of the stars and the solar

system was a reflection of divine reason and providence. In

gnosticism, this notion is overturned. Hans Jonas describes

this transformation:

The starry sky--which from Plato
to the Stoics was the purest
embodiment of reason in the

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> cosmic hierarchy, the paradigm
> of intelligibility and therefore
> of the divine aspect of the
> sensible realm--now stared man
> in the face with the fixed
> glare of alien power and
> necessity. Its rule is tyranny,
> and not providence.
> 6

The sky becomes, for the gnostics, representative of the

terrors of earthly existence. Mythologically, the patterns

of planets and stars are the manifestation of a systematic

separation of the inner self from the Light. The weight of

this separation reflected in the order of the cosmos is

emphasized by the complexity of gnostic cosmogony. A multi-

layered universe, common in ancient diagrams of the cosmos,

has the effect, in gnosticism, of highlighting the barriers

which have been created in order to keep the earthly creation

in darkness.

A description of this cosmogony from "Poimandres" of the

"Hermetic Writings" makes the connection between the layers

of creation separating humanity from the Light and the

concept of earthly fate or destiny:

> But Mind, which is God, being
> both male and female, and
> existing as life and light,
> begot by a word [Logos] another
> Mind, the Demiurge; and he
> being God of fire and of spirit,
> created certain governors, seven
> in number, to surround the
> sensible world with their
> circles. Their governing is
> called Destiny.....But the
> Demiurge Mind, joined with
> the Logos, surrounding the
> circles and compelling them
> to turn as they rush along,
> thus set his creatures
> revolving, and let them turn
> about from an invisible point

> of departure to an unfixed
> goal; for their revolution
> begins where it ends.[7]

In this description the correspondence between the motions
perceived in the visible universe and the motion of the
earthly activity is apparent. The rotation of the stars,
because it begins where it ends, is decribed in "Poimandres"
as being "without reason." The corresponding rotations
implicit in the mundane realm are also irrational. The
effect of the cosmogony is clear. Separation from the Light
produces a creation which has no inherent reason or purpose.
Destiny or fate in this conception implies the unwilled
participation of humankind in a cosmos which is cruel and
without meaning. In "Poimandres" Destiny takes on the role
of the counter to that in humanity which is immortal and
holds the possibility of connection to the Light:

> For this reason man, unlike all
> other creatures on earth, is dual
> in nature, mortal because of the
> body and immortal because of the
> essential Man. For being immortal
> and having authority over all
> things, he suffers the condition
> of mortals since he is subject
> to Destiny. Though he is
> superior to the framework, he
> has become a slave in it.[8]

Freedom from the corporal, then, entails freedom from the
fate associated with involvement in the material realm.

B. Davies' Concept of Human Destiny

i. Resistance to the modern teleological shift

In the contemporary western world, the assumptions which
lay behind the ancient understanding of heimarmene are no
longer dominant. A divine realm and a multi-layered cosmos

are no longer taken for granted. In spite of the ongoing

interest in astrology, it cannot be said that the

relationship between the stars and human destiny is taken

seriously in the dominant culture of the west. George Grant

argues that, in fact, what has happened in the modern west is

that a teleological shift has taken place. The religious

culture has been replaced with a scientific one. No longer

does humankind view itself as bound to a divine system--

whether that system be positive or negative. Rather, as the

children of the Age of Progress we see ourselves as "the

makers of history, the makers of our own laws."[9] Human free

will is not bound by anything outside itself.

There are dissenters to this ideology of the

technological age. Robertson Davies is one of them. In an

interview, Davies speaks of the occurrence of coincidence as

a mark of the reality of destiny:

> I [Davies] think of coincidence
> as a powerful element in life, as
> is also the operation of destiny,
> which may or may not be blind, but
> which is unquestionably powerful.
> This does not make me a thorough-
> going determinist, but certainly
> I mean to suggest that the forces
> that shape a man's fate are not wholly
> under his control, because some of
> them reside in that part of his
> psyche that depth-psychologists call
> the Unconscious.[10]

Davies remains true to his age, speaking of destiny or fate

in relation to the Unconscious rather than to the cosmos.

Nonetheless, the notion of controlling forces beyond human

freedom determining the pattern of life is, in a
technological age, a radical thought.

Throughout Davies' novels, this appreciation for an
externally conditioned destiny recurs. Humphrey Cobler, in _A
Leaven of Malice_, is witness to the reality of forces beyond
human control, when he speaks of the entrapment of life.[11]
In _Fifth Business_, Dunstan Ramsay resists the modern
temptation to attempt to take control of life in favour of
acknowledging the role of fate or chance: "But I was not
sure I wanted to issue orders to life; I rather liked the
Greek notion of allowing Chance to take a formative hand in
my affairs."[12] Simon Darcourt, in _The Rebel Angels_, speaks
of the Imitation of Christ in relation to the acceptance of
destiny implied in the image:

> Gradually it came to me that the
> Imitation of Christ might not be
> a road-company performance of
> Christ's Passion, with me as a
> pitifully badly cast actor in
> the principle role. Perhaps what
> was imitatable about Christ was his
> firm acceptance of his destiny
> and his adherence to it even
> when it led to shameful death.
> It was the wholeness of Christ
> that had illuminated so many
> millions of lives, and it was
> my job to seek and make manifest
> the wholeness of Simon Darcourt.[13]

Through Darcourt, Davies reveals his conviction that an
acknowledgement of the role of destiny in an individual life
is one of the components of human wholeness.

ii. Mythic shapers of destiny

Destiny and its relationship to the human drama is a
theme which receives particular emphasis in _What's Bred in_

the Bone. In this novel, the eternal forces shaping human destiny are characterized in the Lesser Zadkiel and the Daimon Maimas, two supra-mundane figures who have had a role in forming the life history of Francis Cornish. They play different roles in relation to Francis. The Daimon Maimas creates the substance of the individual while the Lesser Zadkiel distributes character traits which have a temporary quality. The Daimon Maimas compares their work to that of Greek sculptors:

> We work like the classical Greek
> sculptors, you and I. I must hew
> the creature out of my own intractable
> piece of rock and put a fine
> surface on it. Then you apply
> the rich colours, of which Pity
> and Charity are very popular
> pigments. They seem to give my
> creation a life that human
> beings understand and love, but
> when the colours are washed
> away by time, the reality is
> revealed, and I know that the
> reality has been there since
> the beginning.
> 14

The existence of the two figures involved in Francis' life corresponds to Davies' understanding of the essential duality in humanity. The attributes painted on by the Lesser Zadkiel are those most evident to the world. They are a part of the public persona of the individual, but they do not define the person. There is a sculpted inner core--the preserve of the Daimon Maimas--which may be concealed for a time by the external face. Both facets of our being have a relationship to broader mythic realities represented in the creating sculptors.

It is not just the human personality which bears this relationship external to itself. What happens to the person--the drama of his or her life--is related to patterns which exist beyond a particular personal history. In *What's Bred in the Bone*, the Lesser Zadkiel and the Daimon Maimas speak of the propensity of people to resist the notion of patterns in life:

> Odd, isn't it, that they [people on
> Earth] are glad enough to have
> their scientists show them evidence
> of pattern in the rest of Nature,
> but they don't want to recognize
> themselves as part of Nature. They
> seem persuaded that they, alone of
> all Creation, so far as they know
> it, are uninfluenced by the Anima
> Mundi.
> 15

When the pattern is perceived, people tend to call it coincidence, a word which the Lesser Zadkiel calls a "dismissive word for people who cannot bear the idea of pattern shaping their own lives."[16] For Davies, speaking through the Lesser Zadkiel and the Daimon Maimas, pattern does exist and the occurrances of coincidences in life stand as visible evidence of that pattern.

iii. The role of astrology

The ancient correspondence between a sense of order in human life and the patterns observed in the skies is also raised in *What's Bred in the Bone*. Davies suggests an approach to astrology similar to that taken with alchemy. In a conversation with Francis Cornish, Ruth Nibsmith speaks of her study of astrology:

Astrology is part of the science of
the past, and of course the science
of the present has no place for it,
because it is rooted in a discredited
notion of the universe, and puts
forward a lot of Neo-Platonic ideas
that don't make much sense--until you
live with them for a while.
17

Cornish asks Nibsmith if these comments mean that she

believes in astrology. Nibsmith, in her response, makes a

distinction between a modern notion of science and

psychology. Her belief in astrology is related to her

conviction that astrology, like alchemy, is a manifestation

of the intuitive part of the human personality. The

intuition is as important to human self-understanding as is

reason. The crucial element in astrology is not the physical

arrangement of stars as such but the intuition of the

astrologer called upon to interpret them.

The ancient science of astrology in Davies' writing. is

used to challenge the modern assumption of human self-

sufficiency implicit in a technological ideology. Astrology

and the concept of destiny which it represents retain, in

Davies' writing, some of the old vocabulary of the supra-

mundane forces influencing human personality and actions. It

is, however, also set in the contemporary context of depth

psychology. Patterns beyond the individual are still at work

to shape human existence, but these patterns are sought more

in the inner self than in the structures of the cosmos.

C. Davies and the Gnostic Interruption of Destiny

Davies' novels do exhibit an affinity to the idea of

heimarmene resulting from an ordered cosmos whether that

cosmos is experienced in the skies as is the case in astrology or in the inner self as is the case in Jungian psychology. As we have seen, the gnostics placed their own negative mark on these classical concepts. The question arises as to whether or not Davies, in his evocation of cosmic patterns and destiny, shares any of the gnostic bias.

One must be cautious about making too close a connection. The human drama, for Davies, does not possess the unrelenting negativity proclaimed by the gnostics. Davies' concern is focused on the recognition of the patterns as a component in the quest for human wholeness. In this sense, his understanding of destiny cannot be called gnostic.

There is, however, a component in Davies' understanding of human destiny which does sound a familiar ring in relation to the gnostic treatment of destiny. Davies claims that he is not a "thorough-going determinist". By this, he means that the mythic patterns which shape the human drama are not, like intuition itself, absolute. Surprises and interventions can occur in the patterns of life.

Using the metaphor of a card game, Simon Darcourt engages in a revealing conversation with Arthur Cornish in What's Bred in the Bone. Cornish argues that the patterns of life are set:

> We are all dealt a hand of cards
> at birth; if somebody gets a
> rotten hand, full of twos and
> threes and nothing above a five,
> what chance has he against the
> fellow with a full flush?
> 18

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To this cynical attitude of total determinism, Darcourt

responds by speaking about the unexpected entering the game:

> Not a card-player, I admit, but
> I am a theologian, and rather a
> good one. Consequently I have
> a different idea of the stakes
> that are being played for than
> you have, you banker. Of course
> everybody is dealt a hand, but
> now and then he has a chance to
> draw another card, and its the
> card he draws when the chance
> comes that can make all the
> difference.
>   19

Using Frances Cornish as an example, he argues that Cornish,

born under the sign of Mercury, had the pattern of his life

upset when he drew Joker cards influenced by Mercury, "the

mischief maker, who upsets all calculations" and who,

according to Maria, "is also Hermes, the reconciler of

opposites--something out of the scope of conventional

morality."[20]   The astrological metaphor, at this point, is

confusing. Astrology is a science of corresponding orders in

the cosmos and in human existence. Davies is using an

astrological image to speak of the disruption of order. What

is important, though, is not what is being said about

astrology but, rather, what is being said about mundane

patterns. For Davies, the Joker card introduced into a

neatly arranged hand of cards or the Mercury and Hermes

figures disrupting a carefully plotted life represent an

unexpected break in the pattern of mundane destiny.

It is at this point that connection with the gnostic

spirit is made. For the gnostics, earthly destiny is a

dismal affair. Left to its own devices, it simply runs in

cirles--"their revolution begins where it ends."[21] It is the intervention of _gnosis_ which makes the difference. The pattern is broken and restoration to the All becomes possible. In this sense, gnosticism is not a system of total determinism. The revealer brings an external element to bear on the pattern implicit in human destiny and, thereby, enables the grip of destiny to be loosened. Davies' concept of destiny does not have the assumed malignancy of the gnostics but it does allow for a break in the pattern of life for the sake of human wholeness. Characters who remain tied completely to the mythic patterns of life are the ones who do not achieve self-understanding because they never stand outside a determined life course and recognize both the pattern of one's life and the opportunities to break with that pattern. In his article, "Robertson Davies and the Ethics of Monologue," Stephen Bonnycastle makes the point that the mythic patterns in the lives of the protagonists of _Fifth Business_ are most evident in the life of Boy Staunton:

> Myths, he [Ramsay] realizes,
> indicate patterns in human
> events, and if you can
> recognize the pattern at the
> outset, you can predict the
> final result.....Ramsay is
> particularly successful at
> seeing patterns in Boy
> Staunton's life.
> [22]

The patterns in Boy's life are so evident to Ramsay because there has been no deviation from the pattern which would cause the picture of Boy's life to become more complex. It is also evident that these patterns so obvious to Ramsay are not seen by Staunton. Ramsay's confrontation with Boy over

the symbolic meaning of the snowball and its consequences is

met with a reaction of amnesia on Boy's part. Because his

life pattern--his destiny--has never been interrupted, Boy

has never been forced to stand outside the ordered movement

of his life and look at it.

This portrait of the individual who sees the world in

prosaic terms without the benefit of the extraordinary

intervention which lifts him or her out of the conventional

path is repeated in other characters. In The Manticore,

David tells Jo von Haller about the housekeeper, Netty:

> Thinking of Netty put me in
> mind of Pargetter's warning
> about the witnesses, or clients,
> whose creed is esse in re:
> to such people the world is
> absolutely clear because they
> cannot understand that our
> personal point of view colours
> what we perceive; they think
> everything seems exactly the
> same to everyone as it does to
> themselves.
>   23

In Davies' world, characters such as Boy and Netty, while

diverse in their respective stations in life, live unexamined

lives. A sense of the relationship between their destinies

and a mythic world beyond the sensible world of day to day

life is lost to them because they have never taken the

opportunity to break with the flow of their life pattern and,

by so doing, observe it from a different perspective.

The desirability of occasional interruptions in human

destiny are a mark of both gnosticism and Davies' novels.

For the gnostic, the interruption takes the form of a

revelation of gnosis which has the power to break the tyranny

of the destiny pattern. For Davies, the break with destiny
is represented by an intervention which allows the
protagonist to step outside of the patterns of his or her
existence and gain the knowledge of the ways in which a
particular life fits into a scheme of myth beyond the self.
Such knowledge leads to greater human wholeness.

D. The Division of Humanity Related to Destiny

1. Gnostic divisions

The opportunity to break with patterns of human destiny,
common to both Davies and the gnostics, does not come to
every individual. In both the gnostic literature and in
Davies' novels an element of elitism seems to be present. A
closer examination of both sets of literature with regard to
those who break with destiny is necessary in order to
determine whether or not the propensity of some to gain
gnosis and others not is the result of a form of election
built into the system.

Like the idea of human destiny, the notion that humanity
is divided along spiritual lines is a common theme in ancient
western thought. Plato identifies three classes of humanity
when he discusses spiritual awareness. G. C. Stead describes
Philo's interpretation of these classes:

> All three classes share the
> common denominator of souls,
> but those of the first class
> refuse all dealings with the
> earth, and are appointed to
> wait upon their creator. A
> second group emerge with
> difficulty from the whirlpool
> of bodily passions and return
> to their source....The third

class are completely over-
whelmed by the body and
worldly concerns.
24

The division of humanity in this manner is found in

gnostic literature. The most extensive treatment of the

theme occurs in "The Tripartite Tractate". This tractate

bears Valentinian characteristics. It varies, however, from

other Valentinian material in its vision of a solitary male

Godhead without a consort. The author also transfers the

devolutionary activity of Sophia to the Logos. In the

tractate the development of gnostic cosmogony is related to

the perceived differences within humanity:

> Mankind came to be in three
> essential types, the spiritual,
> the psychic, and the material,
> conforming to the triple
> arrangement of the Logos, from
> which were brought forth
> the material ones and the
> psychic ones and the spiritual
> ones. Each of the three
> essential types is known by
> its fruit.
> 25

Burns, in The Forbidden Gospel, describes the attributes of

these three levels of humanity:

> ...some men had no "spark of life"
> in them, that is, no part of
> Sophia (which is to say, the
> Pleroma). These they call
> "wooden men' (Gr. hylikoi).
> Of and from them nothing was
> to be expected. Those who
> understood the situation
> intuitively (the spirituals,
> Gr. pneumatikoi) felt called to
> instruct the great number of
> human beings "in the middle"
> (the psychikoi or "psychics").
> 26

"The Tripartite Tractate" claims that these three levels are

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made known by the way they respond to the revealer. Because

the tractate deals with Christian themes the revealer in this

case is Christ. The pneumatikoi are most closely tied to the

Pleroma and, as such, most readily recognize Christ as coming

from that realm of light:

> The spiritual race being light
> from light and like spirit from
> spirit, when its head appeared,
> it ran toward him immediately.
> It immediately became a body of
> its head. It suddenly received
> knowledge in the revelation.
> 27

The psychics who correspond to the middle ground between the

Pleroma and the corruption of creation take more time and

require instruction in order to respond:

> The psychic race is like light
> from a fire, since it hesitated
> to accept knowledge of him who
> appeared to it. (It hesitated)
> even more to run toward him in
> faith. Rather, through a voice
> it was instructed and this was
> sufficient, since it is not far
> from the hope according to the
> promise, since it received, so
> to speak as a pledge, the assurance
> of the things which were to be.
> 28

That part of humanity most closely tied to creation itself--

the hylikoi--resist redemption:

> The material race, however, is
> alien in every way; since it is
> dark, it shuns the shining of the
> light because its appearance destroys
> it. And since it has not received
> its unity, it is something
> excessive and hateful toward the
> Lord at his revelation.
> 29

At first glance, it would seem that the categories described

above would indicate a pre-ordained status with regard to

salvation in the form of the ability to receive <u>gnosis</u>

Certainly, this was a charge brought against the gnostics by

the Church Fathers. Recent research, however, has begun to

question this interpretation of the three levels of humanity.

Pheme Perkins in <u>The Gnostic Dialogue</u> describes an alternate

understanding:

> A common charge against the
> Gnostics is that they claimed
> that there were substantially
> different types of soul, and
> that only the spiritual type
> would be saved. This substantialist
> interpretation seems to be common
> among the heresiologists. We have
> seen that Clement accused them
> of a doctrine of predestination
> that would even render gnosis
> unnecessary. Recently, inter-
> preters have begun to question
> this assessment of the Gnostic
> evidence. The doctrine of types
> of soul can appear as a designation
> for different types of people or
> as a description of the varied
> inner realities of the same
> human person in a single Gnostic
> treatise.
>   30

The esoteric nature of gnostic literature encourages a

variety of interpretations of the same material. The literal

interpretation of the descriptions of the three levels by the

heresiologists was not prompted by a dispassionate academic

interest in the material. Indeed, it can be argued that the

charge of elitism directed at the gnostics arose out of a

need to protect another form of hierarchy. It is Elaine

Pagel's contention that the Church Fathers' resistance to

gnosticism arose as much from a need to protect the church's

role as an intermediary between humanity and God as it did

from a conviction that, in gnosticism, only a portion of

humanity would have access to gnosis. Pagels states:

> But in terms of the social order,
> as we have seen, the orthodox
> teaching on resurrection had a
> different effect: it legitimized
> a hierarchy of persons through
> whose authority all others must
> approach God. Gnostic teaching,
> as Ireneaus and Tertullian
> realized, was potentially
> subversive of this order: it
> claimed to offer to every
> initiate direct access to God
> of which the priests and bishops
> themselves might be ignorant.[31]

Pagels' comments add strength to Perkin's suggestion that the
relating of levels of humanity to a cosmological scheme
should not lead to the assumption that, in actual human
experience, some individuals, by their nature, are denied the
possibility of gnosis. In fact, the three levels of humanity
are not tied to any mundane hierarchy. The recognition of
the three levels comes, according to "The Tripartite
Tractate", at the time of redemption. At the level of
earthly existence, no such evidence for distinguishing
between persons (or, in the alternate interpretation,
distinguishing between levels in the same individual) exists.

ii. Divisions in Davies' world

In Davies' descriptions of contemporary society, an
image of distinct categories of people with regard to
spiritual development does arise. In The Manticore, Liesl
speaks of the "fashionable modern twaddle of the anti-hero
and the mini-soul" which makes "it so laudable, so cosy and
right and easy to be a spiritual runt and lean on all the
other runts for support and applause in a splendid apotheosis

of runtdom."[32]   In the midst of this disparaging picture of

contemporary mass culture, there are heros who run against

the a-spiritual grain of the culture: "But there are heros,

still. The modern hero is the man who conquers in the inner

struggle."[33]   Liesl advises David Staunton that he can be the

hero of his own epic. In order to do it, however, he will

have to recognize and maintain his own distinctive character

in relation to the anti-hero bias of the spiritual runts.

Liesl proclaims:

> "The heroic world is all around
> us, waiting to be known."
>
> [David responds:] "But we don't
> live like that, now"
>
> "Who says so? A few do. Be the
> hero of your own epic. If others
> will not, are you to blame? One
> of the great follies of our time
> is this belief is some levelling
> of Destiny, some democracy of
> Wyrd.[34]

Davies' characters who are able to perceive their own destiny

and to take hold of the significant interventions in that

destiny are portrayed as unique in relation to their society.

    This spiritual understanding--gnosis--displayed by the

major characters of the novels is not democratic. The gift

of gnosis is the preserve of a special breed. Liesl reminds

Ramsay in Fifth Business that her revealing words to him are

not intended to be used in a general fashion. They are,

rather, intended only for the spiritually acute: "What I am

saying is not for everybody, of course. Only for the twice

born."[35]

In _What's Bred in the Bone_, the supra-mundane sub-text
of the novel suggests that there may even be other-worldly
forces which push an individual to break away from the
mainstream of humanity in order to achieve another level--
that of the hero. The Daimon Maimas speaks of the prompting
of Francis Cornish to distance himself from the dull
environment of the small town, Blairlogie:

> There [in Blairlogie] was
> dullness for you' But it's
> been my experience, over several
> aeons, that a good dull
> beginning does no harm to an
> interesting life. Your man
> runs so hard to get away from
> the dullness he was born to
> that you can do very interesting
> things with him. Put them into
> his head to do himself, that's
> to say. Without me, Francis
> would just have been a good
> solid citizen like the rest
> of them.
> 36

Whatever the source, there are, in Davies' world,
distinctions to be made with regard to the spiritual
awareness of people.

The issue as to whether or not this theme in Davies'
novels reflects a system of predestination in which some
persons are doomed to Davies' version of damnation--a life
devoid of self-understanding--raises the same question as has
been previously put with regard to gnosticism. It is
possible, in gnosticism, to interpret the levels of humanity
as being not necessarily connected to particular individuals.
The levels can be viewed as a metaphor for the various
spiritual possibilities which exist within the human psyche.
The fact that the levels are not tied to actual structures in

the mundane realm makes such an interpretation possible.

The same analysis can be made with regard to the distinctions between persons made in Davies' fiction. They can be viewed as personifications of a variety of spiritual stances present in the human story. This possibility becomes stronger when one realizes that the distinctions made between characters in Davies' novels are not tied to social distinctions. Indeed, they often run counter to the categorization of persons in the social order. Referring to the Presbyterians of Blairlogie, Davies states:

> These Presbyterians might have
> had some trouble in formulating
> the doctrine of predestination
> or foreordination which lay
> deep in their belief, but they
> had no practical difficulty in
> knowing who was of the elect,
> and who belonged to a creation
> with a less certain future in
> Eternity.
> 37

Davies' characters achieve spiritual maturity not as a result of their membership in the right church. In fact, such attachments are often seen to be a hindrance.

Similarly, the knowledge which is a critical component of that which makes his characters distinct is not dependent upon categories of excellence established by institutions of learning. The brilliant magician, Eisengrim, has little formal education. Even those whose setting is the university such as Simon Darcourt do not marry their quest for knowing to the agenda of academe. Encounters with Maria's gypsy mother perform a much more critical function in Darcourt's pursuit of self-knowledge than does any classroom activity.

This distance between the distinctions made in the
novels and the distinctions promulgated by the religious and
educational institutions of Davies' world can even be seen in
autobiographic comments made by Davies. When an interviewer
asked him about his image as a man of formidable intellect,
Davies' first response was to speak of his indifferent record
as a formally educated student:

> I am not of formidable learning;
> I am a very scrappily educated
> person, and I am not of formidable
> intellect; I really am not a very
> good thinker. In Jungian terms
> I am a feeling person with strong
> intuition.
> 38

What Davies is saying in this comment is what he is
communicating in his novels. The distinctive qualities which
raise one above the society of runts, make one the hero of
one's own epic, and lead one to self-knowledge, are not
derived from any hierarchal social system. They are related,
rather, to levels lodged in the unconscious just as the
levels of humanity in gnosticism are related to levels
established in the devolution of the cosmos.

This approach to the nature of the distinctions between
people can be seen as a part of Davies' critique of a social
order which promotes an institutional stratification of
people. This critique highlights the affinity between Davies
and the gnostic spirit. Elaine Pagels points out that one of
the features which distinguished Gnostic Christians from
their orthodox adversaries was their refusal to objectify

that which would distinguish the true Christian from the rest

of humanity:

> But orthodox Christians, by
> the late second century, had
> begun to establish objective
> criteria for church membership.
> Whoever confessed the creed,
> accepted the ritual of baptism,
> participated in worship, and
> obeyed the clergy was accepted
> as a fellow Christian.....
> Gnostic Christians, on the
> contrary, assert that what
> distinguishes the false from
> the true church is not its
> relationship to the clergy,
> but the level of understanding
> of its members, and the quality
> of their relationship with
> one another.
> 39

In Davies' work qualitative distinctions do exist between

characters. The distinctions are not, however, related to

any criteria established by the culture. They are tied,

rather, to the presence or lack of a spiritual awareness in

the individual which allows one to sense the dynamic between

one's destiny and the revelatory interventions which free one

from a deterministic interpretation of that destiny.

E. Response to Human Destiny: Gnostic Laughter

In his novels, Robertson Davies reveals himself as a

humourist in the tradition of Stephen Leacock. Davies

satirizes the English Canadian society which provides the

context for his stories. This is particularly evident in the

Samuel Marchbanks stories and the Salterton trilogy. The

comic stance continues, however, in a more subdued form in

the later novels. In his interview with Davies, Donald

Cameron refers to his savage humour. Davies responds by

agreeing with this characterization of his comic writing and

by pointing to the connection between humour and the

existence of a narrowness of spirit in the social order:

> ....there's also a thing which
> I expect you have experienced,
> and which certainly I've
> experienced: the narrow outlook,
> and limited sympathies, and
> want of charity, and general
> two-bit character of what is
> going on under your very eyes,
> which drives you to the point
> of great extravagance. It comes
> out in terms of savage, bitter
> humour, just because you don't
> quite want to go to savage
> denunciation, but you want to
> blast them like an Old Testament
> prophet. Instead you just swat
> them around with the jester's
> bladder. But the impulse is
> the same.
>   40

This use of humour in relation to a context which exhibits,

in Davies' portrayal of it, a narrowness of vision and a

resistance to experiences which do not fit into that vision

can also be oberved in gnostic literature.

John Dart, in <u>The Laughing Savior</u> notes that there is

the presence in some of the gnostic tratates the use of

laughter in relation to a creation which is seen to be

defective. Dart points out that this sardonic expression of

humour is not paralleled in the scripture of the orthodox

church:

> Another less tangible but
> intriguing discovery in the
> tractates is the mocking
> laughter in Gnostic myth
> making. This may be a
> significant clue to the
> Gnostic attitude, for it
> stands in stark contrast to
> the near absence of laughter,

mocking or otherwise, in
the New Testament.[41]

The mocking laughter of the gnostic texts is related to a

contempt for creation. Just as humour serves as a vehicle

for denunciation in Davies' observation of the narrow parts

of his context, so, in the gnostic literature, does laughter

reveal contempt when it is applied to the creation. The

vanity of the creator and the meagreness of his creation

provide the occasion for derisive laughter in "The Second

Treatise of the Great Seth":

> And then a voice--of the Cosmocrator--
> came to the angels: "I am God and
> there is no other beside me."
> But I laughed joyfully when
> I examined his empty glory.
> But he went on to say, "Who
> is man?" And the entire host
> of his angels who had seen Adam
> and his dwelling were laughing
> at his smallness.[42]

Every aspect of creation is the subject of bemused contempt

in this treatise. The notion of incarnation--God associating

with corrupt creatio -is seen as particularly ludicrous. A

docetic Christ is portrayed laughing at the deception

involved in his apparent crucifixion:

> Yes, they saw me; they punished
> me. It was another, their father,
> who drank the gall and the vinegar;
> it was not I. They struck me with
> the reed; it was another, Simon,
> who bore the cross on his shoulder.
> It was another upon whom they
> placed the crown of thorns. But
> I was rejoicing in the height over
> all the wealth of the archons and
> the offspring of their error, of
> their empty glory. And I was
> laughing at their ignorance.[43]

The treatise goes on to label a litany of the heros of the
Hebrew scriptures from Adam to John the Baptist
laughingstocks. The patriarch and the prophets are similarly
labeled because their role of leadership in the nation is
counterfeit. Their role like their creation is tied to the
perversity of creation. The assumption of the role of
patriarch or prophet is ironic because, in fact, they form a
part of the earthly veil which obscures the truly prophetic
voice coming from beyond the cosmos: "The twelve prophets
were laughingstocks, since they have come forth as imitations
of the true prophets."[44]   The reaction to this ironic
deception is laughter.

Those who possess <u>gnosis</u> and, therefore, know the sham
of earthly existence watch the citizens of the world taking
the structures and leadership of the world seriously. They
observe the children of creation held captive to the notion
that the earth, so obviously flawed in the eyes of one with
<u>gnosis</u>, is a natural environment. Their sense of superiority
and contempt for the foolishness of others finds expression
in the sardonic humour behind gnostic laughter.

Robertson Davies reacts with humour in his accounts of
those who place a simple trust in flawed human institutions.
In <u>A Mixture of Frailties</u>, the picture of the shallow piety
of a religious sect is painted in comic tones:

> It [the sect] is very good in
> its own way. That's to say, it
> primes the pump of sweet self-
> pity, mingled with tremulous
> self-reproach and a strong sense
> of never having got a square

deal from life, which passes for
religion with a lot of people--
housewives mostly. It is run
by an unctuous gorilla who
calls himself Pastor Sidney
Beamis; he dishes out the Hope
in a short, moderately disgusting
prayer in which he tells God
that we're all pretty awful
but that the Thirteenth Apostles
are having a bash at sainthood.
                                45

The pretensions of mainstream religion receive the same dose

of sarcasm from Davies. In Fifth Business, he describes the

formation of the United Church of Canada as a "mysterium

coniunctionis....with a doctrine (soother than creamy curd)

in which the harshness of Presbyterianism and the hick piety
                              46
of Methodism had little part."

   In The Rebel Angels, the university and government

bureaucracy are the objects of Davies' wit. At a Guest Night

at Ploughwright College, one of the professors describes his

experiences with the Canada Council:

                    You know how they [the Council]
                    work? It's really like an
                    episcopal visitation in the
                    Middle Ages. You spend months
                    preparing all the material for
                    an application for money to carry
                    on some special piece of work, and
                    then when everything's in order
                    they send a committee of six or
                    seven to meet your committee of
                    six or seven, and you wine them
                    and dine them and laugh at their
                    jokes and tell them everything
                    you've already told them all over
                    again, and treat them as friends--
                    even equals. Then they go back
                    to Ottawa and write to you that
                    they really don't think your
                    plan is quite strong enough to
                    merit their assistance. Overpaid,
                    overpensioned running dogs of
                    bourgeois philistinism.
                                47

The laughter engendered by these descriptions is prompted by
the discrepancy between the pretentions of people and
institutions in Davies' context and the way that they appear
in the context of a wider vision. Just as gnostic laughter
is related to a vision of the world from outside the
constraits of the world produced by _gnosis_, the objects of
Davies' humour are viewed from a vantage point which places
Canadian society in the context of a wider mythic universe.
In the laughter engendered by the caricature of one aspect of
society, a wider vision is made possible. In her commentary
on Davies' plays, Patricia Morley makes this point:

> Davies' masques dramatize an
> image of society and draw the
> audience into it. Human folly
> and vanity and pretensions are
> exposed, through laughter, and
> a vision of beauty and of a
> desirable society is revealed.
> 48

This comic tone is the mark of one who sees beyond human
destiny. The ability to stand apart from the flow of an
unexamined human life exposes that which is shallow and
pretentious in human activity. The gnostic spirit which
promotes the possibility of this kind of distance produces an
irreverent laughter with regard to human activity.

Dart speaks of the contrast between gnostic laughter and
the absence of laughter in the orthodox canon. In a similar
manner, Davies contrasts the delight in the comic exhibited
by some of his characters and the sobriety of much of
Canadian culture. In Leaven of Malice, Solly Bridgewater has
an interest in the early Canadian dramatist, Charles
Heavysege. Bridgewater contrasts Heavysege's comic treatment

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of the devil in his drama with the sobering effect of the

Canadian temperment on the development of the figures from

the Old Testament in his play, Saul:

> Heavysege was awed by angels,
> sobered by Saul, but right in
> his element with the devils.
> He makes them comic, in a
> jaunty, slangy nineteenth-
> century way; her provides love-
> affairs for them. In fact, he
> is at his best with his devils....
> ...Does not Jehovah behave like
> a Canadian when he refuses to
> cheer when his neighbours are
> watching him? Is it not typically
> Canadian of Heavysege's Hebrews
> that they take exception to
> Saul's "raging in a public
> place"? Is it not Canadian
> self-control that David displays
> when, instead of making a noisy
> fuss he "iets his spittle fall
> upon his beard, and scrabbles
> on the door-post"? Friends, these
> are the first evidences of the
> action of our climate and our
> temperament upon the native
> drama.
>   49

Humour serves as a reminder of the fact that the social order

of Canadian society may define the destiny of many of the

nation's citizens. A destiny determined by social

structures. however, is not one which encourages the self-

reflection necessary to discover the true self. It is the

revealing interruption of destiny which povides such an

opportunity. Laughter at the constraints of society is one

of the marks of those who have witnessed a break with mundane

destiny and have been given the chance stand outside the

patterns of human life. Standing outside the mainstream,

they observe the absurdity of the unexamined life and laugh.

VIII.   CONCLUSION: THE VICTORY OF THE SELF

VIII. Conclusion: The Victory of the Self

A. The Goal of Self-Knowledge

1. Knowledge of self in gnosticism

In the midst of the elaborate cosmology of gnostic literature, the devaluation of creation, the struggle with human ignorance, and the intercession of revealer figures, one central goal emerges--gnosis. Knowledge for the gnostic includes both the realization of the captivity of creation and the remembrance of that from which he or she has descended. Such knowledge is personal. Because the creation is corrupt, the knowledge sought by the gnostic is unrelated to the experience of human collectivity. As well as being individualistic, the gnosis is also divine. Because the ultimate result of gnosis is reunion with the unknowable divine, gnosis itself is a part of divinity. The locale for the encounter with divine gnosis is the inner self.

Elaine Pagels argues that the result of this gnostic equation is that self-knowledge becomes an expression of the knowledge of God. She contrasts this position with an orthodox Christianity which "insisted that humanity needs a way beyond its own power--a divinely given way--to approach God."[1] Gnostic Christians rejected the relational implications of this orthodox position. The drama of salvation, for the gnostic, does not occur in the course of human history. It does not occur as a result of a relationship between humanity in history and God. Pagels reminds us that the "gnostic Valentinus taught that humanity itself manifests the divine life and divine revelation."[2] In

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some gnostic literature this idea is taken to a radical

conclusion:

> But some gnostic Christians went
> so far as to claim that humanity
> created God--and so, from its own
> inner potential, discovered for
> itself the revelation of truth.
> This conviction may underlie the
> ironic comment in the "Gospel of
> Philip": "....God created humanity;
> [but now human beings] create God.
> That is the way it is in the
> world--human beings make gods,
> and worship their creation. It
> would be appropriate for the
> gods to worship human beings!"
>   3

This stress on the individual as the locus for the story of

salvation reinforces the observation that the gnostic spirit

is characterized by an aversion to a social dynamic in its

vision of reality. The individual soul and its journey to

wholeness is, in the end, all that really matters.

   11. <u>Knowledge of self for Jung</u>

   By Carl Jung's own admission, he had a strong

fascination with the gnostic story. One of the primary

affinities with gnosticism, for Jung, is related to the

gnostic image of the self. It is not, however, a simple

matter of Jung incorporating the gnostic notion of the

pivotal nature of self-knowledge into his psychology. The

influence can be seen as a two-way dynamic. Jung has also

been able to shape the way in which gnosticism is perceived

in the modern era. In other words, Jung's emphasis on the

self as the repository of the tools needed to achieve human

wholeness has given a particular stress to elements in the

gnostic literature sympathetic to Jung's position. In his

article, "Gnosis and Psychology," Gilles Quispel explains:

> So Jungian psychology has
> already had a considerable
> impact on Gnostic research.
> The term, Self, is used by
> practically everyone; the
> insight that Gnosis in the
> last analysis expresses the
> union of the conscious Ego
> and the unconscious Self is
> commonly accepted; nobody,
> not even the fiercest
> existentialist, can deny that
> Jung is helpful in discerning
> the real meaning of myth.[4]

For Jung, the self is the place where the connection with the
mythic patterns which can provide spiritual order and unity
in an individual life occurs. This concept is complemented
in gnosticism by the emphasis on finding the divine within.
This connection between Jung and gnosticism can be observed
in Edward Edinger's description of Jung's concept of the
self:

> The Self is the ordering and
> unifying center of the total
> psyche (conscious and unconscious)
> just as the ego is the center of
> the conscious personality. Or,
> put in other words, the ego is
> the seat of subjective
> identity while the Self is the
> seat of objective identity.
> The Self is thus the supreme
> psychic authority and subordinates
> the ego to it. The Self is most
> simply described as the inner
> empirical diety and is identical
> with the imago Dei.[5]

There are, of course, differences between Jung's notion
of the self and the ancient gnostic's understanding of the
soul as the repository of the divine. As a modern, Jung does
not share the acosmic bias of the gnostics. Where the

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affinity does lie between the gnostic writers and the modern

psychoanalyst is in the conviction that the defining of true

identity is an internal rather than external matter.

iii. Knowledge of self in Davies' novels

In the preceding pages we have observed that the

characters in Davies' novels journey to exotic places and

have encounters with unusual people. The central drama, for

Davies, however, does not lie in the interaction between his

characters. The focus is, rather, on the implications of the

interplay between people and the experiences of living on the

growth of the inner self. Commenting on the Deptford

trilogy, Jean Strouse, in a Newsweek article say:

> You could call the trilogy
> modern Gothic--a mixture of
> mystery, grotesquerie, desolation
> and psychological sagacity.
> As the three stories spin out,
> Davies plays with Aldous
> Huxley's idea that "Experience
> is not what happens to a man:
> it is what a man does with
> what happens to him."
> 6

In A Mixture of Frailties, Monica Gall's first sexual

experience is notable not for what it says about her

relationship with her lover, but, rather, for the

implications it holds for Monica, herself. The experience

brings about a sense of internal liberation from the social

repressiveness represented by her mother and her strict

pastor:

> She should feel evil, depraved--
> she knew it. But, miraculously, at
> this moment when she should have
> stood in awe of her mother, and
> Pastor Beamis and the whole moral

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> code of the Thirteeners, she
> felt, on the contrary, free of
> them, above and beyond them as
> though reunited with something
> which they sought to deny her. [7]

In this and other passages from Davies' novels, human

relationships play a secondary role to the important drama of

self-discovery. Peter Baltensperger identifies this primary

concern with the growth of the inner self as a central theme

in Davies' writing. He states:

> The assertion of Magnus
> Eisengrim near the conclusion
> of The Manticore, "I am
> what I have made myself,"
> and Liesl's postulate in the
> same chapter that "the modern
> hero is the man who conquers
> in the inner struggle"
> crystallize the theme which
> underlies all five novels
> of Robertson Davies from
> Tempest-Tost (1951) to
> The Manticore (1972). It
> is the theme of psychological
> growth toward wholeness which
> is based on the existential
> struggle carried on in the
> interior spaces of the mind
> and which culminates in the
> fulfillment of the "yearning
> for greater enlightenment
> through mystical experience."
> (Tempest-Tost) [8]

In his literature, Davies reveals an identification the

psychological bias of Jung and with the spiritual bias of the

gnostics. In human existence, it is the inner struggle which

is critical. The external conflicts of the world may be

important but, in the end, they serve as props in the

individual soul's journey toward individuation (in Jung's

terms) or reunion with the All (for the gnostic).

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B. The Internal Kingdom

One of the implications of this emphasis upon the self
is a _telos_ which is quite solitary by nature. If the
struggle for wholeness is an internal matter, then the
victory at the end of the conflict is an unshared one. Hans
Jonas has said that aloneness is one of the results of the
gnostic desire to break with the world. He comments:

> The pantheistic or panlogistic
> confidence of antiquity is
> shattered in Gnosticism. The
> self is discovered as in-
> commensurable with all things
> of nature. This discovery at
> first makes the self emerge in
> its utter solitude: the self is
> discovered by a break with the world.[9]

Elaine Pagels argues that break with antiquity leads to an
internal concept of Kingdom which is radically different from
the biblical understanding of the image of Kingdom. In "The
Gospel of Philip," Jesus' disciples ask about entering the
Kingdom. Jesus responds that this will happen "'When you
make the two one, and when you make the inside like the
outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like
the below, and when you make the male and the female one and
the same...'"[10] Pagels contrasts this gnostic answer with
the descriptions of Kingdom in the synoptic gospels:

> According to Matthew, Luke and
> Mark, Jesus proclaimed the coming
> Kingdom of God, when captives
> shall gain their freedom, when
> the diseased shall recover, the
> oppressed shall be released, and
> harmony shall prevail over the
> whole world. Mark says that the
> disciples expected the Kingdom to
> come as a cataclysmic event in
> their own lifetime, since Jesus

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> had said that some of them would
> live to see "the Kingdom of God
> come with power."
> [11]

The difference between the two visions of Kingdom is obvious.
In one version the Kingdom comes in relation to human history
and one of its fruits is right relations among the children
of God. In the other gnostic version the Kingdom comes in
spite of human history and is marked by the solitariness of
the soul re-uniting with its source.

C. The Hero-Journey Toward Kingdom

The individualistic version of Kingdom is the
appropriate setting for the metaphor of the hero-journey.
The individual seeking wholeness is the solitary hero in
search of the Kingdom. In Fifth Business, Padre Blazon uses
this image in a conversation with Ramsay. When Ramsay tells
Blazon of his encounter with Liesl and of its transforming
effect, Blazon exclaims:

> You met the Devil as an
> equal, no cringing or
> or frightened or begging
> for a trashy favour. That
> is the heroic life, Ramezay.
> You are fit to be the
> Devil's friend, without
> any fear of losing yourself
> to Him.
> [12]

The heroic life is one in which the integrity of the inner
self is not sacrificed to the external world. Meeting the
devil as an equal implies a refusal to be held captive to a
destiny in which the devil plays a deciding role. Meeting
the devil at all is an act of defiance in a world which
prefers denial and repression of the evil one.

Patricia Monk argues that the hero-journey is, in

reality, the objectification of the individuation process.
She states:

> Individuation is a subjectively
> known process; the hero-journey
> an objectively observed process;
> hence the myth of the hero-
> journey can be said to objectify
> the subjective state of the
> individual undergoing the process
> of individuation.
> 13

A further addition can be made to the connection which Monk

proposes between the hero-journey and the process of

individuation. The hero-journey also objectifies the gnostic

quest for gnosis.

The picture of the hero, like the picture of the Kingdom

being sought, is a solitary one. The characters of Davies'

novels reinforce this image. Born into communities, the

protagonists of Davies' novels make dramatic breaks with the

people and places of their youth. There is no physical

return to Deptford or Blairlogie for Ramsay, Staunton,

Eisengrim or Cornish. The towns may be bred in their bones

but they cease to be a living reality.

As has been mentioned, the solitary path of these men

is emphasized further by their unmarried state (Cornish's

attempt at marriage was brief). The relational dimension is

foreign to their mission in life. A relationship in life

would be an intrusion of the relationship with the inner

self. This fact is demonstrated in the description of Simon

Darcourt's infatuation with Maria Theotoky. In his

reflections on his feelings toward Maria, Darcourt compares

her to the fallen Sophia and tells her of this association.

Maria makes it clear that a physical relationship between them would, therefore, be impossible:

> Simon, you called me Sophia:
> the Divine Wisdom, God's
> partner and playmate in
> Creation. Now perhaps I am
> going to surprise you:
> I agree that I am Sophia
> to you, and I can be that
> for as long as you wish,
> but I must be my own human
> Maria-self as well, and if
> we go to bed it may be
> Sophia who lies down but
> it will certainly be Maria--
> and not the pest of her--
> who gets up, and Sophia will
> be gone forever.
>   14

Following this conversation, Darcourt sleeps like a child and wakes up immeasurably refreshed. As a hero seeking psychic and spiritual wholeness, Darcourt cannot be encumbered with serious relationships in the world. The danger is dramatically put. To enter into relationship with the mundane Maria would destroy the feminine part of his soul-- the Sophia. The inner journey would be in peril.

The gnostic spirit in Davies' writing is shown forcefully in his dramatization of the central goal of his major characters. As the gnostic divorces him- or her-self from the world and enters into a solitary, internal journey toward the knowledge of self and God, so do Davies' characters distance themselves from mundane commitments to communities and fellow travellers in order to engage in the psychic drama of the inner self which leads to self-recognition.

D. The Theological Implication

i. The gnostic spirit

At the beginning of this dissertation, a thesis was stated which was centered on the conviction that the novels of Robertson Davies contain the marks of a contemporary gnostic spirit. This spirit is shown most strongly in the individualism of Davies' world. The collective oppression of the small town is escaped in favour of environments where the individual journey will be unfettered by social expectation. In gnosticism, the imprisonment of all of creation including the communities of humanity is abandoned for the sake of the individual soul. In Davies' novels, the revealing helpers along the way act as instructors who point the way to an individuated life. They are portrayed rarely as fallible fellow creatures with whom the mystery of life is shared. In Christian gnosticism, the primary revealer, the Christ, is a passionless redeemer who leads the disciple out of the world, rather than the fully human one who suffers with humanity on the cross. The encounter with evil in Davies' writing is found in an internal struggle involving one's own relationship with a personal devil. The corporate dimension of evil is subordinated to the personal need for internal balance. In gnosticism, the particular expression of evil in the human community is of no account in the light of the need of the soul to escape an evil creation altogether. Finally, the _telos_ of the heroic journey is to be found in the wholeness of individual being and not in reconciliation on a social or political plane. For the gnostic, the Kingdom

possesses no this-worldly connections. It is, rather, the return of the soul to its acosmic source.

Robertson Davies' art is representative of a gnostic spirit. In relation to contextual theology in the Canadian context, it is representative of a particular way of responding to a technological culture in which myth and mystery have little place. It is also representative of a response to a religious culture which would deny the possibility of human wholeness by replacing the mythic drama of human spirit with either a liberal accommodation to the offical optimism of modernity or a conservative imposition of moral codes.

Davies' gnostic response to the dominant culture and religion of his society is one in which distance from the society is created in order that the solitary life of the spirit may be given room to develop. What is sacrificed in this response is a social dimension to spiritual transformation. The individual may become whole but no attempt is made to bring this possibility to the community.

ii. An alternative to the gnostic spirit

An alternative to Davies' response does appear in other representatives of Canadian literature. In Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel, her major protagonist, Hagar Shipley is, like Davies' characters, the product of a small Protestant town. Unlike Davies' characters, her life adventures do not take place in exotic settings. As was mentioned in the reference to Lennox's article in Chapter Two, Laurence's characters don't leave their setting in the

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way that Davies' people do. Even a move to the west coast in old age does not really take her away as she is living with her son and daughter-in-law.

In the novel, the minister, Mr. Troy, represents the religious community of little vision. He is described as "the little minister straight from the book."[15] His attempts at pastoral care are fumbling and show little recognition of what lies under the surface of the human story. Hagar reflects that "that pearly Mr. Troy would be wasting his time in offering me his murmured words."[16] Toward the end of the novel, however, it is this uncertain minister who, by singing a psalm in a hospital room, opens up a moment of self-recognition and grace for Hagar. Her revealer is not someone who knows, but is, rather, a struggling fellow traveller. Self-recogniton comes to her not in a place of "big spiritual adventures" but in her own culture in the presence of one representing an often repressive part of that culture. In "the knowing" that comes upon Hagar "so forcefully" there is a vision not of the kingdom of the individuated soul but, rather, of the joy of life enacted in relationship. The repressiveness of social conventions is not only that which keeps us from ourselves but, also that which keeps us from others and from the creation:

> How long have I known? Or
> have I always known, in some
> far crevice of my heart,
> some cave too deeply buried,
> too concealed? Every good
> joy I might have held, in
> my man or any child of mine
> or even the plain light

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                    of morning, of walking the
                    earth, all were forced to a
                    standstill by some brake of
                    proper appearances--oh, proper
                    to whom?  When did I ever
                    speak the heart's truth?
                                      17
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Laurence and Davies begin their stories in the same

cultural context. Their characters face the same limitations

presented by the world of the "Scottish banker" and the

"daughter who stayed at home with mother." What

distinguishes the two Canadian novelists is their response to

that world. Laurence's characters stay where they have been

placed. They experience grace from others who share their

context. Liberation comes in the struggle to live in the

midst of that which represses. Human wholeness is acted out

in the human community.

Davies, on the other hand, moves his characters away

from their contexts. Spiritual awakening comes to them from

those who know. Freedom is to be found in self-knowledge.

Human wholeness is the preserve of the inner life.

Theologically, the contrast is significant. Hagar's

discovery of self within her own context from one who stands

by her bed without knowing what to say is, in literary form,

a manifestation of incarnational theology in which divinity

is to be found in the midst of broken humanity.

The recognition of self in Davies' writing through

confident revealer figures who direct the attention of their

hearers away from their context and toward the inner self is

representative of a gnostic myth of escape from the world to

the divine within.

It is the individualism of Davies' understanding of the
possibility of freeing oneself from a restrictive environment
which distinguishes the counter-cultural dynamic in his
novels from that found in other writers such as Laurence.
This difference between Davies and Laurence is similar to the
difference between the gnostic myth of the individual soul
seeking reunion with the divine and the orthodox myth of the
church as a corp   e body (the "bride") receiving the
promise of an eschatological unity with the Godhead.

The individualistic bias in Davies' approach to the
forms of captivity found in his culture and his advocacy of
self-knowledge as the means of escape from societal prisons
is a powerful mark of the gnostic spirit in his novels.

iii. The gnostic spirit: particular and general

The significance of this gnostic spririt, for the
theologian, is to be found in the contribution which it makes
to the articulation of the Christian tradition in the
contemporary Canadian context. In the introduction to this
dissertation, the term "case study" was used to describe the
exploration of the theological impications of the writing of
one Canadian writer. By restricting the scope of the
dissertation to the novels of Robertson Davies, there was a
recognition that this would mean that some theological themes
would be emphasized and some neglected. What emerges from
this approach is a particular response to the reality of
living in the present Canadian scene. The challenge to the
theologian is to reflect upon this response and to place it
theologically in the larger context of the tradition's

ongoing struggle to understand the relationship between God
and humanity.

In Thinking the Faith, Douglas Hall speaks of the
relationship between the particular and the whole in
Christian theology. In speaking of the particular, which is
the concern of any theology which claims to be contextual,
Hall makes the point that the particular does not stand alone
without any reference to a larger reality. Hall states:

> While contextualization immediately
> suggests the particularization of
> theological reflection, it does not
> do so in a narrow or isolationistic
> manner. A context implies both the
> particular and that by which the
> particular is surrounded.
> 18

While it is true that the whole can never be grasped fully
(if such were possible, there would be no need for particular
images of God), the drive toward seeing individual contexts
in relation to a more global perspective remains an important
part of the theological discipline.

In relation to the preceding case study involving
Robertson Davies' evocation of a gnostic spirit in his
writing, this need to see his particular picture of reality
in relation to a trans-contextual understanding of the
divine-human relationship which theology attempts, within the
limitations of human knowledge, to discern, can be realized
in the following manner.

The central problem identified in the cultural context
of Davies' novels--the repression of parts of one's being and
the subsequent loss of human wholeness--can be related a more

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general theological concern for human limitation. Davies'
response to this cultural condition--exercising the dynamic
of escape from repression through self-knowledge--can be held
in tension with the response to limitation found engendered
by Christian faith and tradition.

The restlessness of Davies' protagonists in relation to
the world of the small Ontario town is particular in the
sense that it is a response to an ethos which is historically
conditioned. In World of Wonders, Ramsay expresses the
uniqueness that cultural conditioning brings to the dominant
ideas in a particular time and place when he contrasts the
puritanism of Deptford with an understanding of puritanism
acquired in an English university:

> 'Ingestree talked for quite a while
> about the nature of puritanism. He
> doesn't know anything about it. It's
> just a theological whimwham to him.
> He's talked about puritanism at Oxford
> to Ronny Knox and Monsignor D'Arcy,
> but that stuff means nothing in terms
> of the daily, bred-in-the-bone
> puritanism we lived in Deptford.
> North American puritanism and the
> puritanism the English know are worlds
> apart.19

At the same time, the restlessness is also related to a more
general sense of human unease with the discrepancy between a
vision of full humanity articulated in the stories of the
tradition and the obstructed vision engendered by the self-
definition of the social order. The resistance of Davies'
characters to their world is not restricted to the phenomenon
of small town Protestantism. It is also a manifestation of a
human reaction to the realization of the dichotomy between a

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vision based on some sort of eschatological hope and an ideology engendered by the desire for social accomodation.

In the North American context, this dichotomy is expressed in the contrast between a theological tradition based on a vision of God-given freedom and hope emerging from the darkness of human folly represented by the cross and an ideology of modernity based on the assumption that human freedom and hope are to be found in an optimistic view of history and a confidence in technology. The horrors of the twentieth century have tended to weaken confidence in the ideology of modernity. This has left an opening for the other side of the dichotomy which has, hitherto, been quite overwhelmed by the forces of the "official religion of optimism." Douglas Hall identifies this opening in <u>Thinking the Faith</u>:

> <u>The crisis of the dominant culture</u>
> <u>of North America is a particular species</u>
> <u>of the failure of the modern vision.</u>
> Since mainstream Christianity on this
> continent permitted itself to be
> absorbed into modernity, it has been
> helpless, for the most part, to come
> to terms with this failure. Nevertheless,
> there exists for us a persistant and
> urgent call for originality as a
> disciple community at the nerve center
> of the First World; and there are
> signs that this call is being heard.
> [20]

The failure of the modern vision leads to a re-examination of the other contrasting vision to be found in the origins of the religion co-opted by the agents of modernity.

The relationship between the particular and the general is apparent. Christian theology asserts that it is a part of the <u>esse</u> of human existence to experience the tension between

a vision of humanity and divinity implicit in creation and an obscuring of that vision by structures and ideologies created as a result of human sin. In the North American culture this dynamic takes on a particular character. The conflict is more precisely defined by the historical development of a society committed to an ideology of progress and the corresponding neglect of those parts of the tradition which pointed to human limitation and dependence upon God. In the novels of Robertson Davies this universal dichotomy between revealed vision and human repression receives the specific description to be found in the Canadian version of acculturated Calvinism and in the alternate vision of gnostic mythology.

The relationship between the general and the particular is also important in relation to the choice which Davies makes with regard to the alternate vision with which to counter the dominant culture of his novels. Faced with the restlessness engendered by a social order which would repress any vision not contained by its self-definition, Davies, along with other sensitive tellers of the human story, has selected the ideas and myths which have the power to resist repression. The argument of this dissertation is that Davies' novels reveal the selection of a gnostic myth as the theological ground for this counter-cultural vision. This choice has significance not only within the confines of Davies' literary enterprise. It is also a part of the

broader history of mythic alternatives revealed in other times and places.

In the early church, orthodoxy and gnosticism represented alternate responses to the reality of human sin. One vision held the reality of evil in tension with the goodness of creation and maintained that glimpses of human liberation from the captivity of sin could be seen in the divine-human experience of Christ's death on the cross and in the corporate image of the church as the body of Christ. The other vision rejected the notion of a this-worldly tension between good and evil in which glimpses of the divine might be contemplated in either individual or corporate human form. Instead, the gnostic vision countered the reality of evil with an individual acosmic escape. The amorphous, anti-institutional nature of the gnostic vision combined with anti-gnostic campaign of the early heresiologists deprived this vision of any official status in Christendom. In terms of the rhetoric of the church, it could be assumed that the orthodox vision achieved a firm ascendency over the gnostic vision.

We need, at this point, to be reminded of Elaine Pagels' contention that the gnostic vision, while granted no official status by the church, did not disappear from the scene but remained "as a suppressed current."[21] In our own age, it has made a particularly strong re-appearance in various parts of the secular and religious world. In the psychology of Carl Jung, the novels of Herman Hesse and, even, according to Philip J. Lee, in some manifestations of contemporary

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Protestantism, gnostic themes can be discerned.

The alternative of the gnostic vision has been made more attractive by the dimming of the orthodox vision in those situations in which Christendom has opted to resolve the tension between the social order and the insights of orthodox faith and tradition by accommodating the message of the church to the needs of the culture. A gnostic vision which was never accepted by the church often appears a clearer alternative to the message of a repressive culture than an orthodox view which has become blurred by the machinations of political and social compromise.

Davies' choice of the gnostic myth to counter the barriers to self-knowledge which he perceives in his culture represents the participation of an artist of a particular culture in a more general form of revolt which is to be found in widely diverse societies and time periods. Davies' attraction to the gnostic spirit over against the form of resistance chosen by some of his fellow Canadian writers such as Margaret Laurence--a form which discovers the resources for the challenge to a compromised orthodoxy within orthodoxy itself--reflects the concerns represented in a broad definition of gnosticism which encompasses particular manifestations of it. The notion that "the psyche bears within itself the potential for liberation or destruction"[23] points to an individualism and an independence of nature and community which provides a common thread to the amorphous movement carrying the gnostic label. Davies' particularly

Canadian version of the individual and internal search for human wholeness is a part of this broader response to an orthodoxy which would insist upon human relationship with the rest of creation as an essential part of true humanity.

This case study based upon the discovery of the gnostic spirit in the writings of Robertson Davies demonstrates the way in which the themes engendered by Judeo-Christian orthodoxy and by the various forms of resistance to that orthodoxy are realized in a particular culture. With a body of literature providing a window through which a particular world is glimpsed, the theologian enters into a dialogue in which the visions prompted by the tradition and the realities of life are able to inform and challenge each other.

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I. INTRODUCTION

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II.   The Meeting Place for Theology and Literature: Symbols and Myths

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36. Ronald Sutherland, The New Hero: Essays in Comparative Quebec/Canadian Literature (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), p. 2. In an article in the Journal of Canadian Studies, David Dooley expresses a word of caution regarding Sutherland's thesis: "He [Sutherland] is undoubtedly correct in finding parallels

between Calvinism and Jansenism (which has been described as 'St. Augustine seen through Calvinist spectacles'), but he seems to attach the label of puritanism or the label of Jansenism to almost any kind of restraining religious influence." David J. Dooley, "Simulating the Stars: Canadian Literature and the Legacy of Nietzsche," _Journal of Canadian Studies_, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Peterborough: Trent University, Spring, 1977), pp. 89 - 90.

37. Ibid. pp. 3 - 4.

38. Ronald Sutherland, "Christianity in Canada and the Canadian Mystique," unpublished paper, p. 23.

39. Edgar Z. Friedenberg, _Deference to Authority: The Case of Canada_ (White Plains, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1980), p. 101.

40. George Grant, _Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism_ (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1965), p. 70.

41. Donald Cameron, _Conversations With Canadian Novelists_, Part One (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1973), p. 100.

42. Ibid., p. 134.

43. Hugh MacLennan, _Each Man's Son_ (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1951), p. 67.

44. Scott, _The Climate of Faith in Modern Literature_, p. 59.

45. Sutherland, _The New Hero_, p. 4.

46. Davies, _Fifth Business_, p. 25.

47. Davies, _World of Wonders_, p. 38.

48. Davies, _Fifth Business_, p. 23.

49. Ibid., p. 226.

50. John Watt Lennox, "Manawaka and Deptford: Place and Voice," _Journal of Canadian Studies_, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Peterborough: Trent University, Fall, 1978), p. 29.

51. Ibid., p. 24.

52. Ibid., p. 29.

53. John Harris, "A Voice from the Priggery: Exorcising Davies' Rebel Angel," _Journal of Canadian Fiction_, Vol. 33 (Montreal: JCF Press, 1981-82), p. 112.

54. Robert Cluett, "Robertson Davies: the Tory Mode," Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Peterborough: Trent University, February, 1977), pp. 41 - 2.

55. Robertson Davies, "A Rake at Reading," Mosaic, Vol. XIV, No. 2 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, Spring, 1981), p. 17.

56. Cameron, op. cit., p. 41

57. Davies, World of Wonders, p. 287.

58. Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), p. 32.

59. Robertson Davies, A Mixture of Frailties (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1958), p. 158.

60. Grant, Technology and Empire, p. 123.

61. Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), pp. 151 - 2.

62. Ibid., p. 129.

63. Pheme Perkins, The Gnostic Dialogue: The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 212.

64. Gilles Quispel, "Hermann Hesse and Gnosis" in Barbara Aland (ed.), Gnosis: Festschrift fur Hans Jonas (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) p. 431. The heterodoxy of gnosticism makes precise definitions difficult. Frederick Wisse speaks of a working definition including "the elitist, esoteric, syncretistic and anti-authoritarian attitudes of the Gnostics. The intense acosmic and ascetic spirit of the Gnostics must receive its rightful place. It is still unclear whether we will be able to become much more definite than this." Frederick Wisse, "Prolegomena to the Study of New Testament and Gnosis," in A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn (eds.), The New Testament and Gnosis (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1983), p. 142.

65. Perkins, op. cit., p. 212.

III. The Present Reality: The Gnostic Understanding of Creation and Robertson Davies' Interpretation of Canada

1. Genesis 1

2. Paul Tillich, The Protestant Era, tr. by James Luther Adams (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 8.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 186.

5. Benjamin Walker, Gnosticism: Its History and Influence (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press, 1983), p. 46.

6. Ibid., p. 52.

7. Perkins, The Gnostic Dialogue, p. 114

8. Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, p. 250.

9. Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels, p. 172.

10. Ibid., p. 32.

11. Perkins, op. cit., p. 114.

12. Jonas, op. cit., pp. 3 - 27

13. J. Edgar Burns, The Forbidden Gospel (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 12.

14. Ibid.

15. Perkins, op. cit., p. 165.

16. Jonas, op. cit., p. 338

17. In his research on the Canadian establishment, Peter Newman identifies an ideology prevelant among the Canadian business elite. Its label and the attributes given to it are a reminder of the suggestion made in the literature of the nation that Calvinist Protestantism (or, at least, the acculturated version of Protestantism) is the predominate category into which the values held by the elite in Canada are placed. Newman describes this ideology and its nomenclature in this comment on Lord Thomson: "Lord Thomson's oath of allegiance to the Protestant ethic is deep within the Canadian business tradition. It is a view of life that stresses the more sombre virtues, the quiet good feeling of a hard day's work, the idea that the good man always more than earns his pay....The idea of the Protestant ethic as state religion appeals to most businessmen." Peter C. Newman, The Canadian Establishment (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), p. 147.

18. Robertson Davies interview with Peter Newman quoted in Patricia Morley, Robertson Davies (Toronto: Gage Educational Publishing, Ltd., 1977), p. 67.

19. Robertson Davies, "The Canada of Myth and Reality" in Paul Denham and Mary Jane Edwards, Canadian Literature in the 70's (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Ltd., 1980), p. 5.

20. Ibid., p. 3.

21. Sutherland, The New Hero: Essays in Comparative Quebec/Canadian Literature, p. 2.

22. Davies, op. cit., p. 3.

23. Sutherland, op. cit., p. 3.

24. Ibid., pp. 4 - 5.

25. Sidney Mead, The Lively Experiment (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 5.

26. Ibid., p. 128

27. Douglas John Hall, Lighten Our Darkness: Toward an Indigenous Theology of the Cross (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), p. 46.

28. Dennis Duffy, "Heart of Flesh: Exile and Kingdom in English Canadian Literature," Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Peterborough: Trent University, Summer, 1983), p. 61.

29. Reinhold Niebuhr, The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 51.

30. Ibid., p. 53.

31. Carl A. Raschke, The Interruption of Eternity: Modern Gnosticism and the Origins of the New Religious Consciousness (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980), pp. 174-5

32. Ibid., p. 176

33. Ibid.

34. Niebuhr, op. cit., pp. 16 - 18

35. Grant, Technology and Empire, p. 17

36. Duffy, op. cit., p. 59.

37. John Moir, "Religion," in J. M. S. Careless and R. Craig Brown (eds.), The Canadians: 1867 - 1967 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967), p. 587.

38. Grant, op. cit., p. 68.

39. Davies, op. cit., p. 9.

40. David J. Dooley, "Simulating the Stars: Canadian Literature and the Legacy of Nietzsche," Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Peterborough: Trent University, Spring, 1977), p. 85

41. Sutherland, op. cit., pp. 4 - 5

42. Ibid., p. 83.

43. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 226.

44. Sutherland, op. cit., p. 83.

45. Mordecai Richler quoted in Friedenberg, Deference to Authority: The Case of Canada, p. 110.

46. Davies, op. cit., p. 12.

47. W. Stanford Reid, "Introduction" in W. Stanford Reid (ed.), The Scottish Tradition in Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), p. ix.

48. Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), p. 65.

49. A. Margaret MacLaren Evans, "The Scot as Politician," in Reid (ed.), op. cit., p. 296.

50. Reid, "The Scottish Background," ibid., p. 9.

51. Richler, op. cit., p. 110.

52. Hugh MacLennan, Two Solitudes (Toronto: Collins,1945), pp. 130 - 1.

53. William Westfall, "Order and Experience: Patterns of Religious Metaphor in Early Nineteenth Century Upper Canada," Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Peterborough: Trent University, Spring, 1985), p. 10. Margaret Evans in an article entitled "The Scot as Politician" also uses Bishop Strachan as a representative of the conservative Scottish leaders who were to predominate in the ecclesiastical and governmental systems of nineteenth century Canada: "Imbued with characteristic Scottish concern for religion and education, Strachan became the first Anglican Bishop of Toronto (having been, prior to a change in denomination, a Presbyterian minister), trained a whole generation of future political leaders in his own schools for the 'sons of gentlemen'.......His political design for the province was essentially conservative: Upper Canada should be a balanced society in the Burkean sense, with aristocratic leadership and an established church.....Yet his anti-democratic concept of government was entirely compatible with material progress." A. Margaret MacLaren, op. cit., p. 279.

54. Grant, op. cit., pp. 23 - 4.

55. Davies, op. cit., p. 16

56. Davies, Leaven of Malice, p. 10.

57. Davies, The Manticore, p. 57.

58. "No memoir of our day is thought complete without some comment on the sex life of its subject, and therefore let me say that during my early years as a school-master I found a number of women who were interesting, and sufficiently interested in me, to give me a sex life of a sort." Davies, Fifth Business, p. 134.

59. Ibid., p. 104.

60. Ibid., pp. 21 - 2.

61. MacLennan, op. cit., p. 131.

62. Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), p. 34.

63. Davies, op. cit., p. 21.

64. Morley, Robertson Davies, p. 12.

65. Davies, World of Wonders, p. 230.

66. Davies, Leaven of Malice, p. 64.

67. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 141.

68. Robertson Davies, A Mixture of Frailties (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1958), p. 42.

69. Robertson Davies, Tempest-Tost (Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books Canada, Ltd., 1980), p. 74.

70. Ibid., pp. 79 - 80.

71. Davies, World of Wonders, p. 140.

72. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 18

73. Ibid., p. 265

74. Ibid., p. 128

75. Ibid., p. 311

76. Ibid., p. 128.

77. Ibid.

78. Nancy E. Bjerring, "Deep in the Old Man's Puzzle," Canadian Literature, No. 97 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, Autumn, 1974), p. 58.

79. Davies, op. cit., p. 43.

80. Davies, The Manticore, p. 7.

81. Lennox, op. cit., p. 29.

82. Clara Thomas, "The Two Voices of A Mixture of Frailties," Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Peterborough: Trent University, February, 1977), p. 89.

83. Cameron, op. cit., p. 61.

84. Grant, op. cit., pp. 36 - 7.

85. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 10.

86. Ibid., p. 311.

IV.   The Way of Escape--Gnosis

1. "The Exegesis on the Soul (II, 6), tr by William C. Robinson in James M. Robinson (ed.), The Nag Hammadi Library (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 185.

2. Rudolf Bultmann, Gnosis (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1952), p. 17.

3. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.), Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Vol. V, tr. by David E. Green (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), p. 469.

4. Bultmann, op. cit., pp. 4 - 5.

5. Kurt Rudolph, Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism, tr. edited by Robert McLachlan Wilson (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 60.

6. Philippians 1: 9 - 10.

7. Romans 7: 7b

8. 1 Corinthians 8: 10.

9. R. McL. Wilson, Gnosis and the New Testament (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), p. 77.

10. Bultmann, op. cit., p. 42.

11. John 7: 28 - 29

12. John 1: 18

13. Raymond Brown, The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John (i - xii) (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966), pp. liv -lvi.

14. Wisse, op. cit., p. 143.

15. Raymond Brown, op. cit., p. lvi.

16. George W. McRae, "Nag Hammadi and the New Testament," in Barbara Aland (ed.), Gnosis: Festschrift fur Hans Jonas (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), p. 150.

17. G. C. Stead, "In Search of Valentinus,' in Bentley Layton (ed.), The Rediscovery of Gnosticism (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), p. 75

18. Colossions 1: 9b - 10.

19. Bultmann, op. cit., p. 43.

20. Jonas, op. cit., p. 174.

21. Ibid., p. 176.

22. Ibid., p. 288.

23. Rudolf, op. cit., p. 62.

24. Ibid., p. 116.

25. Perkins, op. cit., p. 168.

26. Ibid., p. 169.

27. "The Paraphrase of Shem" (VII 1, 1 - 49, 9), tr. by Frederik Wisse, The Nag Hammadi Library, p. 309.

28. Ibid., pp. 309 - 10.

29. Psalm 139: 7.

30. Jonas, op. cit., p. 124.

31. Perkins, op. cit., pp. 183 - 4.

32. "The Hypostasis of the Archons" (II, 4), tr. by Bentley Layton, The Nag Hammadi Library, p. 159.

33. Birger A. Pearson, "The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature," The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, p. 477.

34. Jonas, op. cit., p. 195.

35. Ibid.

36. Rudolph, op. cit., p. 119.

37. "The Concept of Our Great Power" (VI, 4), tr. by Frederik Wisse, The Nag Hammadi Library, p. 286.

38. "The Gospel of Truth" (I, 3), tr. by George W. MacRae, The Nag Hammadi Library, p. 40.

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40. "The Gospel of Truth" (I, 3), op. cit., pp. 44 - 45.

41. Ibid., p. 40.

42. John Dart, The Laughing Savior: The Discovery and Significance of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic Library (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 74.

43. Bentley Layton, The Gnostic Treatise on Resurrection from Nag Hammadi (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1979), p. 15

44. Pagels, op. cit., pp. 146 - 7. Pagels argues that the heterodox nature of gnostic thought contributes to the resistance to institutionalized authority in matters of doctrine: "But gnostics tended to regard all docrtines, speculations and myths-- their own as well as others--only as approaches to truth. The orthodox, by contrast, were coming to identify their own doctrine as itself truth--the sole legitimate form of Christian faith.", p. 137.

45. Ibid., p. 142.

46. Davies, A Mixture of Frailties, p. 108.

47. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 311.

48. Davies, World of Wonders, pp. 41 - 2.

49. Ibid., p. 41.

50. Jonas, op. cit., pp. 44 - 5.

51. Davies, The Manticore, p. 242.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., pp. 242 - 3.

54. James Neufeld, "Structural Unity in 'The Deptford Trilogy': Robertson Davies as Egoist," Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol. XII, No. 1 (Peterborough: Trent University, February, 1977), p. 73.

55. Davies, _Fifth Business_, p. 56.

56. Davies, _The Manticore_, p. 18.

57. Davies, _World of Wonders_, pp. 29 - 30.

58. Neufeld, op. cit., p. 73.

59. Davies, _Fifth Business_, p. 169.

60. Davies, _A Mixture of Frailties_, p. 233.

61. Davies, _Fifth Business_, p. 294.

62. Ibid., p. 266.

63. Ibid., p. 294.

64. Davies, _The Manticore_, p. 272.

65. Ibid., p. 266.

66. Pagels, op. cit., pp. 178 - 9.

67. Bonnycastle, op. cit., p. 35.

68. Davies, _World of Wonders_, p. 271.

69. Bonnycastle, op. cit., p. 38.

70. Davies, op. cit., p. 288.

71. Davies, _What's Bred in the Bone_, p. 16.

72. Davies, _The Rebel Angels_, p 55.

73. Davies, _Tempest-Tost_, p. 182.

74. Davies, _A Mixture of Frailties_, p. 247.

75. Ibid., p. 245.

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79. Davies, _The Manticore_, p. 90

80. Patricia Monk, _The Smaller Infinity: The Jungian Self in the Novels of Robertson Davies_ (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 136.

V. The Helpers: Revealers and Mythic Patterns

1. Rudolph, op. cit., pp. 118 - 9.

2. Ibid., p. 121.

3. "The Apocalypse of Adam" (V, 5), tr. by George W. MacRae, The Nag Hammadi Library, pp. 256 - 7.

4. "The Paraphrase of Shem" (VII, 1), tr. by Frederik Wisse, The Nag Hammadi Library, p. 309.

5. Ibid., p. 308. The quote comes from Wisse's introduction to the tractate.

6. Rudolph, op. cit., p. 132.

7. Perkins, op. cit., p. 88.

8. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 31.

9. Terry Goldie, "The Folkloric Background of Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy," Studies in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy, p. 23.

10. Monk, op. cit., p. 10.

11. Ibid.

12. Gertrude Jaron Lewis, "Vitzliputzli Revisited," Canadian Literature, No. 76 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, Spring, 1978), p. 133.

13. Ibid.

14. Wilfred Cude, "Historiography and Those Damned Saints: Shadow and Light in Fifth Business," Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Peterborough: Trent University, February, 1977), p. 49.

15. "The Paraphrase of Shem," op. cit., p. 308. The quote is from Wisse's introduction to the tractate.

16. Baltensperger, op. cit., p. 66.

17. Ibid., p. 67.

18. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 240.

19. Ibid., p. 311.

20. Ibid., p. 241.

21. Goldie, op. cit., p. 25.

22. Ronald Sutherland, "The Relevance of Robertson Davies," _Journal of Canadian Studies_, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Peterborough: Trent University, February, 1977), p. 78.

23. Davies, op. cit., p. 61.

24. Ibid., p. 64.

25. Ibid., p. 230.

26. Ibid., p. 139.

27. Ibid., p. 266.

28. Cude, op. cit., p. 67.

29. Davies, _The Rebel Angels_, p. 257.

30. Davies, _What's Bred in the Bone_, pp. 17 - 18.

31. Ibid., p. 59.

32. Perkins, op. cit., p. 171.

33. Davies, _The Rebel Angels_, p. 235.

34. Pagels, op. cit., p. 79.

35. Rudolph, op. cit., p. 80.

36. "The Apocryphon of John" (II, 1), tr. by Frederik Wisse, _The Nag Hammadi Library_, p. 101.

37. Jonas, op. cit. p. 299.

38. Ibid., pp. 176 - 7.

39. "The Thunder, Perfect Mind" (VI, 2), tr. by George W. MacRae, _The Nag Hammadi Library_, pp. 271 - 2.

40. Jonas, op. cit., pp. 104 - 5.

41. "The Gospel of Mary" (BG 8502, 1), tr. by George W. MacRae and R. McL. Wilson, _The Nag Hammadi Library_, p. 472.

42. "The Gospel of Thomas" (II, 2), tr. by Thomas O. Lambdin, _The Nag Hammadi Library_, p. 130. Pheme Perkins challenges the notion that the disciples' objection to Mary is related directly to her sex: "The objections against Mary are not against femininity as such. Rather, Andrew and Peter speak like orthodox officials. Their objections are typical of rhetorical objections to opponents in any context and are no indication of the sociological makeup of the various groups. Andrew protests that

such teaching could not possibly have come from the Savior. Peter asserts that the Lord would not have revealed anything to a woman privately that he had not told all the apostles openly (17, 10 - 22). Both objections are common in anti-Gnostic polemic which insists that such strange teachings are in conflict with the apostolic tradition." Perkins, op. cit., p. 136.

43. Davies, Fifth Business, pp. 13 - 14.

44. Ibid., pp. 50 - 1.

45. F. L. Radford, "The Great Mother and the Boy: Jung, Davies and Fifth Business," Studies in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy, pp. 67 - 68.

46. Davies, op. cit., p. 102.

47. Ibid., pp. 104 - 5.

48. David M. Monaghan, "Metaphors and Confusions," Canadian Literature, No. 67 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, Winter, 1976), p. 67.

49. Davies, op. cit., p. 55.

50. F. L. Radford, op. cit., p. 73.

51. Marilyn Chapman, "Female Archetypes in Fifth Business," Canadian Literature, No. 80 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1979), p. 133.

52. F. L. Radford, op. cit., p. 73.

53. Bjerring, op. cit., p. 55.

54. Davies, op. cit., pp. 265 - 6.

55. Dart, op. cit., p. 32.

56. Pagels, op. cit., p. 154.

57. Monk, op. cit., pp. 139 - 40.

58. Monaghan, op. cit., pp. 65 - 6.

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60. Ibid., p. 245.

61. Stephan Hoeller, "C. G. Jung and the Alchemical Revival," Gnosis, No. 8 (San Francisco: Lumen Foundation, Summer, 1988), p. 37.

62. Davies, The Rebel Angels, p. 82.

63. Davies, World of Wonders, p. 315.

64. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 313.

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66. Daniel Lawrence O'Keefe, Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 14.

67. Ibid., p. 537.

68. Davies, World of Wonders, p. 29.

69. Ibid., p. 25.

70. Ibid., p. 270.

VI. Dualism and the Nature of Evil

1. Jonas, op. cit., pp. 31 - 2.

2. Luke 1: 51b and 1 Samuel: 7b.

3. Arthur Hilary Armstrong, "Gnosis and Greek Philosophy," Gnosis: Festschrift fur Hans Jonas, p. 96.

4. Jonas, op. cit., p. 57.

5. "The Gospel of Philip" (II, 3), tr. by Wesley W. Isenberg, The Nag Hammadi Library, p. 132.

6. Jonas, op. cit., p. 196.

7. Jonas, op. cit., pp. 250 - 1.

8. Jonas, op. cit., p. 252.

9. Goldie, op. cit., p. 27.

10. Monk, op. cit., p. 40.

11. Davies, The Manticore, p. 99.

12. Davies, The Rebel Angels, p. 146.

13. Davies, The Manticore, p. 84.

14. Monk, op. cit., p. 122.

15. Davies, World of Wonders, p. 287. Patricia Monk comments that Davies put a particularly Canadian emphasis on Spengler's "dual universe." "The idea of the dual universe is not, of course, original with Spengler....For Davies, however, it has a

specifically Canadian application. He touches on this briefly in
The Manticore (M98-9) and at greater length in an interview when
he discusses the Canadian habit of seeing the two sides of a
conflict not only as aspects of the same thing but also as
tending to run into one another." Monk, op. cit., p. 170.

16. Davies, World of Wonders, p. 287.

17. Hall, op. cit., pp. 23 - 4.

18. Jones, op. cit., p. 19.

19. Davies, The Manticore, p. 273.

20. Davies, The Rebel Angels, p. 73.

21. Rudolph, op. cit., p. 187.

22. Walker, op. cit., p. 46.

23. Pagels, op. cit., p. 172.

24. "The Gospel of Thomas" (II, 2), op. cit., p. 123.

25. Jonas, op. cit., p. 131.

26. Rudolph, op. cit., p. 181.

27. "The Gospel of Truth" (I, 3 and XII, 2), tr. by George W.
MacRae, The Nag Hammadi Library, p. 40.

28. Jonas, op. cit., p. 21.

29. Ibid., pp. 127 - 8.

30. Cameron, op. cit., p. 41.

31. Davies, World of Wonders, p. 140.

32. Ibid., pp. 140 - 1.

33. Ibid., p. 141.

34. Davies, The Rebel Angels, p. 236.

35. Monk, op. cit., pp. 94 - 5.

36. Hall, op. cit., p. 100.

37. Ibid., pp. 113 - 4.

38. Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann (eds.), Luther's
Works, Vol. XXXI, p. 41.

39. Hall, op. cit., p. 127.

40. Ibid., p. 136.

41. Ibid., p. 134 - 5.

42. C. G. Jung in Stephan Hoeller, The Gnostic Jung and the Seven Sermons to the Dead (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1982), p. 49.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., p. 78.

45. Ibid., p. 79.

46. Monk, op. cit., p. 132.

47. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 266.

48. Davies, World of Wonders, p. 57.

49. Ibid.

50. Hall, op. cit., pp. 147 - 8.

51. Ibid., pp. 151 - 2.

52. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 255.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., p. 256.

55. Ibid., p. 293.

56. Davies, World of Wonders, p. 41.

57. Ibid., p. 85.

58. Ibid., pp. 42 - 3.

59. Ibid., p. 43.

60. Hall, op. cit., p. 67.

61. Ibid., p. 111.

62. Jonas, op. cit., p. 267.

63. Ibid., pp. 274 - 5.

64. Rudolph, op. cit., p. 257.

65. Davies, The Manticore, p. 42.

66. Davies, World of Wonders, p. 290.

67. Davies, The Rebel Angels, pp. 254 - 8.

68. Ibid., p. 67.

69. Bonnycastle, op. cit., p. 21.

VII. Human Destiny and the Interruption of Gnosis

1. Jonas, op. cit., p. 246.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Rudolph, op. cit., p. 106.

5. Ibid., p. 58.

6. Jonas, op. cit., pp. 254 - 5.

7. R. M. Grant, op. cit., p. 213.

8. Ibid., p. 214.

9. George Grant, Philosophy in the Mass Age (Toronto: The Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1959), p. 42.

10. Davies, "The Deptford Trilogy in Retrospect", Studies in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy, p. 11.

11. Davies, Leaven of Malice, p. 183.

12. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 129.

13. Davies, The Rebel Angels, p. 56.

14. Davies, What's Bred in the Bone, p. 83.

15. Ibid., p. 206.

16. Ibid., p. 207.

17. Ibid., p. 298.

18. Ibid., p. 12.

19. Ibid., pp. 12 - 3.

20. Ibid., p. 13.

21. R. M. Grant, op. cit., p. 213.

22. Bonnycastle, op. cit., p. 25.

23. Davies, The Manticore, p. 242.

24. G. C. Stead, "In Search of Valentinus," The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, pp. 93 - 4.

25. "The Tripartite Tractate," op. cit., p. 89.

26. Burns, op. cit., p. 14.

27. "The Tripartite Tractate," op. cit., p. 89.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Perkins, op. cit., pp. 181 - 2.

31. Pagels, op. cit., p. 32.

32. Davies, The Manticore, p. 266.

33. Ibid., pp. 266 - 7.

34. Ibid., p. 267.

35. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 266.

36. Davies, What's Bred in the Bone, p. 59.

37. Ibid., p. 21.

38. Cameron, op. cit., p. 42.

39. Pagels, op. cit., pp. 126 - 8.

40. Cameron, op. cit., p. 43.

41. Dart, op. cit., p. xxi.

42. "The Second Treatise of the Great Seth," VII 49, 10 - 70, 12, The Nag Hammadi Library, p. 331.

43. Ibid., p. 332.

44. Ibid., p. 335.

45. Davies, A Mixture of Frailties, p. 38.

46. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 146.

47. Davies, The Rebel Angels, p. 181.

48. Morley, op. cit., p. 48.

49. Davies, Leaven of Malice, pp. 179 - 80.

VIII. Conclusion: The Victory of the Self

1. Pagels, op. cit., p. 146.

2. Pagels, op. cit., p. 147.

3. Pagels, op. cit., pp. 146 - 7.

4. Gilles Quispel, "Gnosis and Psychology," The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, p. 23.

5. Monk, op. cit., p. 66.

6. Jean Strouse, "The Inventor of Gods," Newsweek (February 8, 1982), p. 79.

7. Davies, A Mixture of Frailties, p. 182.

8. Baltensperger, op. cit., p. 59.

9. Jonas, op. cit., p. 264.

10. Pagels, op. cit., p. 155.

11. Ibid.

12. Davies, Fifth Business, p. 294.

13. Monk, op. cit., p. 164.

14. Davies, The Rebel Angels, p. 257.

15. Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (Toronto: Seal Books, 1978), p. 34.

16. Ibid., p. 32.

17. Ibid., p. 261.

18. Douglas John Hall, Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), p. 150.

19. Davies, World of Wonders, p. 38

20. Hall, op. cit., p. 158.

21. Pagels, op. cit., p. 129.

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22. See Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

23. Pagels, op. cit., p. 152.

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