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N81
No. 7104

THE FOOL-SAINT AND THE FAT LADY: AN EXPLOARATION
OF FREAKS AND SAINTS IN ROBERTSON DAVIES'S
THE DEPTFORD TRILOGY

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Jennifer A. McClinton, B.A.

Denton, Texas

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McClinton, Jennifer A., The Fool-saint and the Fat Lady: An Exploration of Freaks and Saints in Robertson Davies's *The Deptford Trilogy*. Master of Arts (English), December, 1994, 54 pp., references, 18 titles.

In *The Deptford Trilogy*, Robertson Davies uses the circus freaks and the Roman Catholic Saints who influence the main characters to illustrate the duality inherent in all human beings.

The first chapter of this thesis outlines this idea and explains why the trilogy's second novel is not included. The second and third chapters give an overview of the histories of freaks and saints. The fourth chapter explores Dunstan's journey towards and acceptance of his darker side while chapter five examines Paul's travels in the opposite direction. Chapter six demonstrates that Davies's use of saints and freaks ties together these two seemingly disparate groups of people and at the same time makes both groups appear more like the rest of humanity.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The *Deptford Trilogy*, consisting of *Fifth Business* (1970), *The Manticore* (1972), and *World of Wonders* (1975), narrates and explores the lives of three different men. All three are born in the small rural town of Deptford, Ontario, around the turn of the century, and each becomes something far different from anything anyone in Deptford would have predicted. Dunstable Ramsay, later Dunstan, becomes a decorated war hero, a distinguished history master, and a professional hagiographer. Percy Boyd Staunton, later Boy, becomes a millionaire and a government official eventually driven to suicide. Paul Dempster, later Magnus Eisengrim, becomes a world famous magician.

Dunstan is the narrator of *Fifth Business*, which is written in the guise of a letter to his headmaster. This letter becomes a chronicle not only of his life but of his battle between good and evil, both in himself and in society. *World of Wonders* is also narrated by Dunstan, but it is Paul's story, told to a famous film director, a cameraman, and a producer. Like Dunstan's story, it chronicles the convergence of good and evil in the life of its subject. Boy Staunton's story is told in *The Manticore* by his son David. Unlike the other two novels, it centers not on one of the men from

Deptford, but on the effects Boy's life and death had on the lives of others. It is logical that Boy would not tell his own story, because he is not a self-reflective man. The stories his only son chooses to tell about his father reveal much more about Boy's character than would have any impressions Boy might have had about himself. David battles his demons just as Dunny and Paul do, but because most of these demons are exorcised by his growing understanding of his father's motives, his journey is of a different nature than the journeys of the other two.

Dunny and Paul both must accept a side of themselves that they fear. Dunny refuses throughout most of his life to accept the dark side of his own character and his attraction to evil, whereas Paul refuses to accept the idea that he possess virtuous qualities. Both men see things from one view and must be convinced, through the help of several other characters, to admit to the opposing side of their personalities. Dunny and Paul, by the end of each novel, have accepted this duality and emerge more complete human beings.

Dunny believes perfection exists, and he chooses to look for it in the community of saints. In the study of hagiography Dunny believes he will find heroes and icons that have no flaws, either visible or invisible. He eventually finds, though, that all human beings, even saintly ones, have ignoble or malevolent impulses, and this only signifies that they are human, not that they are, as Dunny fears wicked.

Davies uses saints, both official and unofficial to represent the duality of human nature. About this community of holy peoples, Davies writes:

I am very interested in the condition of sainthood. It is just as fascinating as evil. . . . Most saints have been almost unbearable nuisances in life. Some were reformers, some were sages, some were visionaries, but all were intensely alive, and thus a living rebuke to people who were not. . . . Society hates exceptional people because such people make them feel inferior. (*Enthusiasms* 346-47)

The study of hagiography, discussed here in Chapter Two, supports Davies' comments. People have typically constructed and worshipped saints who fit their needs, and usually these needs involved the paradox of honoring saints for their extreme holiness while at the same time taking pride and comfort in those saints who shared the same imperfections as their earthly followers. Davies uses the actual saints that Dunny studies to help the hagiographer see the need to recognize these imperfections in his own character. Davies also constructs such saintly, yet flawed characters as Mary Dempster and Padre Blazon to aid these recognitions. Through his associations with these characters Dunny is able to accept the concept of duality--that both good and evil can exist in the same individual--and live with it in his own character.

For Paul Dempster's journey Davies shows the duality of human nature primarily through the characters in Wanless' World of Wonders. The freaks in the sideshow indicate to Paul that, despite their appearances, they are normal human beings. The history of sideshow freaks, as discussed here in Chapter Three, demonstrates that regardless of the social stigma placed on these people, most of them were happy and led full, even normal lives. As Robert Bogdan observes in his 1988

study of freak show exhibitions, society has long associated disability with evil (viii). People who possess abnormalities so great that they can be exhibited for profit, yet who also lead normal lives--who marry, have children, obtain an education--are therefore an appropriate vehicle to use in order to challenge the tendency to associate abnormality with evil and demonstrate the full range of emotion and character present in human beings. Along with both groups having an apparent opposition between their external personas and their internal characters, saints and freaks also share the quality of having been constructed to fit the public's desires. Saints and freaks are what they are for other people, not for themselves.

In addition to the cost of the World of Wonders, Paul is helped on his journey by Sir John and Milady Tresize, who are reminiscent of Dunny's facilitators, the saints. Unlike Dunny, Paul does not realize what lies below the surfaces of his peers until after he has left them. This is because Paul is only a child during his time at the carnival. As he matures during his theater experiences, he begins to see people in greater depth. he needs the experience that comes with adulthood to allow him to see his past acquaintances in a dual light.

The character who helps Paul see this about his former associates also helps Dunny to achieve completeness. Liesl, with her disfigured appearance, combined with her intelligence, charm, and grace, represents for both men a great paradox. They both think her a freak, but Dunny would like to run from her, while Paul is attracted to her abnormalities. They both discover, however, that to hold such a one sided view of anyone is dangerous, for it keeps them from deeply seeing and knowing other

people and themselves. Liesl, for both men, is the final factor pushing them to be complete, happy human beings.

In the body of criticism on *The Deptford Trilogy*, the theme of sainthood has been frequently explored. Wilfred Cude, Stephen Bonnycastle, John Bligh, and Terry Goldie have all discussed the hagiographic aspects of *Fifth Business* and *The Manticore*. However, no critic has attempted to explore the definition of saint and what this definition means to the novels. A brief review of the politics behind the canonization process reveals the title of saint to be arbitrary in nature and frequently constructed through artificial means. These elements of the condition of sainthood, when applied to the novels, show that anyone, and here, any character, can under certain circumstances, be viewed as a saint.

The purpose of the freaks in the trilogy has been even more neglected by the critics than has the purpose of the saints. No critic has yet applied the sociology of the carnival world to an examination of the three novels. As does the history of saints, the history of sideshow freaks demonstrates how loosely these titles are applied to human beings. The histories also reveal the artificiality of the definitions. Again, given the criteria often used for bestowing the label of "freak" on a human being, anyone could be fairly referred to as a freak. By placing these two extreme groups of people--the saints and the freaks--in the trilogy, and by showing that each group contains elements of the other, Davies suggests that all human beings possess both good and evil impulses, impulses stereotypically associated with the two groups.

Davies also implies that the actions triggered by these impulses can be seen as either good or evil, depending largely on the audience for those actions.

CHAPTER II

THE STUDY OF HAGIOGRAPHY

In the study of saints and their surrounding cults, an important task of the hagiographer is to explain or to discover what events or attributes allow a person to achieve sainthood. Saints are not merely extremely good, or even extremely holy people; several requirements must be met before a person can be beatified, or later canonized. These requirements, established by Pope Urban VIII in the seventeenth century and still adhered to today, dictate that the candidate for sainthood be judged in three general areas; doctrinal purity, heroic virtue, and miraculous intercession after death (Bell 141).

The first two areas reflect the fears of the church leaders that somehow heretics or practitioners of black magic might be admitted into the community of saints (141). As Rudolph M. Bell and Donald Weinstein report in their 1982 study of saints and society, "fortune tellers . . . witches, geomancers, and necromancers competed with holy people" by amazing their contemporaries with apparently supernatural powers of "prophecy and clairvoyance, the ability to foretell the future and the ability to know people's thoughts" (147). The officials of the Roman Catholic Church were aware that supernatural powers attributed to saints were more important to the large populations of the rural areas than were the traditional virtues of chastity, poverty, and obedience to God. Many faithful citizens felt their own lives were full of righteous

suffering in the name of God. In the saints they venerated, they wanted something more, something that would obviously place those saints above the rest of the populace. It is important to realize, however, that the common people, while desiring their saints to possess unearthly qualities, also wanted them to retain elements of normality in order to better link those saints with the human and mortal backgrounds from which they came. This desire to elevate certain chosen people, while simultaneously anchoring them in the real world, is not exclusive to Roman Catholicism. Historian Stephen Wilson in analyzing this trend writes that

Most religions, including monotheistic Judaism as well as Islam, distinguish in practice if not in strict theory between a higher god or gods and lesser divine beings. The former are remote, concerned with origins and things cosmological, while the latter are more familiar, in closer touch with mortals, and are concerned with mundane matters.

(1-2)

During their first dinner together, Padre Blazon adamantly cautions Dunny about this apparent contradiction in the veneration of saints. using Saint Dominic as an example, he explains that the average peasant woman with her desperate life needs not the "fierce and persistent" man that Dominic really was, but rather a saint who can "see the beautiful soul in her . . . a man without passions or desires--a sort of high-minded eunuch" (*FB* 175). Blazon then says that because human beings cannot triumph over sin as completely as saints, and

because we love the saint and want him to be more like ourselves, we attribute some imperfection to him . . . Thomas Aquinas was monstrously fat; St. Jerome had a terrible temper. This gives comfort to fat men and cross men. Mankind cannot endure perfection; it stifles him. He demands that even the saints should cast a shadow. If they, these holy ones who have lived so greatly but who still carry their shadows with them, can approach god, well then, there is hope for the worst of us. (*FB 176-77*)

Blazon, with his extensive background in hagiology, is aware of the power of popular thought in redefining or shaping the reputation of a saint. Even he admits that all saints are saints for other people and are therefore constructions--not found, but made.

In addition to the common people's influence over the reputation of a saint, their influence over who was actually chosen was of even greater relevance. Given that a large and determined following was the first step to being canonized, the cult of a prospective saint carried a great deal of power in the selection process. Because of the third requirement for sainthood, miraculous intercession after death, the canonization process cannot begin until after the death of the candidate. This condition necessitates the process being left in the hands of the followers remaining: consequently, the image of the dead saint often became molded and distorted to fit the needs of the worshippers. Pierre Deloof, in his essay on the sociology of canonization, writes, "All saints are more or less constructed in that, being necessarily

saints for other people, they are remodelled in the collective representation which is made of them" (195).

Delooz cites numerous cases of saints having been almost wholly constructed by the public consciousness; but perhaps the most striking is the example of St. Philomena, a fourth-century Christian who was not canonized until the mid-nineteenth century:

This case is particularly interesting for it clearly illustrates how sainthood is born in the opinion of others. On 25 May 1802, a body was discovered in the Priscillian catacombs on the Via Salaria. On the basis of a few indicators, it was declared to be the body of a martyred virgin. Miracles took place and the new saint became popular.
(194-95)

Delooz goes on to point out, however, that even when the entire reputation of a saint is the figment of someone else's imagination, as is the case of St. Anne, the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that reputation can still serve to fulfill and enrich the lives of those who pray to and take inspiration from the saint (196). Because numerous saints had biographies that were partially or completely fabricated, taking these saints from the community would create a great void in the faith of many religious people, a void that is, Delooz implies, better left uncreated.

In *Fifth Business*, Blazon explains this to Dunny. He stresses that, in the case of Mary Dempster, it is not the official requirements for sainthood that are important, but rather the role she has played in Dunny's life: "if you think her a saint, she is a

saint to you" (*FB* 178). After Blazon has had years to consider Dunny and his fool-saint, he decides, "on All Saints' Day, I do not think you will do anything but good by honouring the name of Mary Dempster in your prayers" (253). From the first time he hears the story of Mary Dempster, Padre Blazon knows she will never officially become a saint; Dunstan, however, remains hopeful about her candidacy for many years.

Given Dunstan's thorough knowledge of sainthood and hagiography it seems irrational for him to give serious hope to the idea that she could someday be canonized. Because of her experience with Surgeoner in the gravel pit, she clearly does not meet the requirement of doctrinal purity. Although heroic virtue might be seen in her seemingly selfless motives during the same act, she had not been fully in control of her mind since the night of Paul's birth. It would appear, then, that even if her miracles had been accepted by the hierarchy of the church, her poor showing in the other two categories would have ruled out her candidacy. Dunny could not have been unaware of this; he must have somehow rationalized his feelings of hope. He would have been aware of the one exception made by the Roman Catholic Church in considering for sainthood those not scoring well in the designated categories: the exception of martyrdom. As Delooz notes, "In the eyes of the Catholic community, martyrdom by itself is sufficient to ensure sainthood, even if it has sometimes been preceded by a scandalous life" (207). In the case of Mary Dempster, the scandal took place after her "martyrdom" and not before it; but perhaps, since she had, however inadvertently, given her life for another, in fact for several others, Dunny was able to

excuse her shortcomings in the rigid categories. Even Dunny, the thorough academician, was capable of excusing his saint's shortcomings in order to fit his own needs.

CHAPTER III

THE FREAKS OF THE SIDESHOWS

Like the community of saints, the group of people who have been known in our society as freaks were often portrayed with a striking paradox. Their exhibitors, often with the help of the freaks themselves, distorted and exaggerated the "freakishness" of these human oddities while at the same time stressing how "normal" they were in their everyday lives. This tactic was used to link the exhibits with the people who came to the carnivals and museums to view them. Just as in the case of sainthood, the extraordinary qualities of the freaks were the most important and most obvious elements of their reputations, but the ordinary qualities were just as necessary. A brief look into the sociology of the sideshow freaks and the people who paid to see them demonstrates why creating this paradox was such an effective means of presentation.

Human beings have an impulse to fear what they do not understand. The inclination of human beings to distance themselves from those in their number who are physically or mentally deviant is perhaps one of the cruelest manifestations of this impulse. Isolated human beings possessing deformities that place them outside the mainstream risk the possibility of tortured, lonely lives. In primitive societies such people were thought of as bad omens or curses on their families, and very often these infants were left for dead by grieving and terrified parents who thought they have

surely angered some god. Although it is no longer acceptable to use the words "freak" or "monster" to describe abnormal people, Leslie Fiedler suggests that mentally we look upon such births just as our less technologically advanced ancestors did: "the more archaic levels of our own minds suggest that perhaps such creatures not only are not bad jokes, much less products of random chemical changes in our genes, as we have been more recently persuaded to believe, but omens and portents" (20). Fiedler goes on to point out that before the word "freak"--a shortening of the term *lupus naturae*, meaning freak of nature--was commonly used, the word "monster" was the preferred term for physically and mentally deviant people. Although the etymology is obscure, the possible meanings of the word are significant. Fiedler explains: "whether it derives from *moneo*, meaning to warn, or *monstro*, meaning to show forth, the implication is the same; human abnormalities are the products not of a whim of nature but of the design of Providence" (20).

The practice of deriving pleasure from viewing people with abnormalities can be traced back to ancient Egypt, when dwarfs and midgets were considered sacred due to their resemblance to the dwarf gods Ptah and Bes (Fiedler 47). During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, small people were used at court to entertain royalty, and in the Victorian era the process of exhibiting freaks, including dwarfs and midgets, who by that time had lost their mythical aura, became popular. The phenomenon of the organized Freak Show perhaps had its start when, in 1840, P.T. Barnum purchased the American Museum in New York City and exhibited, for the price of a dime, what he called "human curiosities" (Harris 32).

While the organized Freak Show did not begin until the mid-nineteenth century, Fiedler argues that the desire to view freaks is inherent in all human beings:

The true Freak stirs both supernatural terror and natural sympathy, since he is one of us, the human child of human parents . . . and he challenges the conventional boundaries between male and female, sexed and sexless, animal and human, large and small, self and other, and consequently, between reality and illusion, experience and fantasy, fact and myth. (24)

But even as we are open to accepting the humanity of the freak on some level, we are simultaneously inclined to violently reject them as "one of us". The modes of presentation used in the Freak Show help to stress this paradox. Showmen fabricated everything about the acts in order to achieve their own specific purposes. Their backgrounds, their personal characteristics, the nature and origin of their conditions were all molded to fit the needs of the show. Robert Bogdan observes: "Freaks are what you make them. How they were packaged, how they were dressed, how they acted, and what the audience was told about them--their presentation was the crucial element in determining their success, in making a freak" (95).

Bogdan divides the modes of presentation into two major categories: the exotic and the aggrandized. Exhibits portrayed in the exotic mode consisted of men, women, and children who said by their exhibitors to have come from distant countries or ancient tribes such as the Aztecs. The literature distributed during the shows, which purported to explain their exotic backgrounds, was "steeped in racism, imperialism,

and handicapism" (Bogdan 278). The goal of this approach was to associate these exhibits with danger and primitive customs, while at the same time stressing that they were, amazingly enough, part of the human race. Many of the people falling into this category were microencephalics, or as the show people called them, "pinheads."

Almost all of them were the mentally retarded children of poor Americans who were led to believe their children would become famous and lead far better lives than they could afford to give them.

A notable example of this type of presentation is William Henry Johnson, exhibited for seven decades as "Zip" or, more often, "What is It?" The official story on Johnson claimed that he was found cavorting in the trees along the River Gambia (Bogdan 136). Actually, he was born around 1849 to a poor black family in Bound Brook, New Jersey (134). Because Victorian America was fascinated by primates but knew little about them, it was often insinuated that Johnson, along with many other "wild" men and women, was a "missing link," or "half-man, half-monkey" (135-36). Although this mode of presentation seems horribly cruel and dehumanizing, it cannot be ignored that William Henry Johnson did live a more comfortable and exciting life than he would have had he lived out his life on a small farm in New Jersey. He was valued and loved for his abnormalities instead of shunned and feared as many mentally retarded people were during his lifetime.

Not all of those presented in the exotic mode were mentally retarded, but almost all of them were of diminished mental capacity, whether this condition came about congenitally, through accident, or through the effects of substance abuse

(Bogdan 260-62). In *World of Wonders*, when Willard has succumbed to his drug addiction and can no longer be controlled, he is exhibited, along with Zitta, in "The Shame of the Old South," a perfect example of both the exotic mode and its accompanying exaggeration. Magnus says that the "suggestion was that Willard and Zitta . . . were what happened when families became inbred." Magnus also guesses that few people believed the story but "the appetite for marvels and monsters is insatiable, and he [Willard] was a good eyeful for the curious" (676).

While the exotic mode was usually successful and relatively easy to create, the aggrandized mode was more popular. People exhibited in this mode included all people with deformities and also people of unusual height or weight. The content of these presentations consisted largely of stressing the "normal" accomplishments of the acts. For instance, Master Sanders K.G. Nellis, an armless man exhibited in the middle years of the nineteenth-century, was lauded in the bally for being able to do such things as load and shoot a pistol, cut with scissors, and wind his watch (Bogdan 216-17). Charles Tripp, a late nineteenth-century man with the same affliction, was presented as a "responsible, prudent bachelor and citizen" (219).

The aggrandized mode of presentation accomplished two different goals for the showman. Because the freaks were always presented on raised platforms and introduced with highly exaggerated speeches, they were distanced from their audiences. The purpose of this, Leslie Fiedler says, was to be "finally therapeutic, cathartic, no matter what initial terror and insecurity it evokes. 'We are the Freaks' the human oddities are supposed to reassure us, from their lofty perches. 'Not you!

Not you!' (31). But because the hype surrounding them stressed how "normal" they were, showmen forced the audience to see themselves in the freaks on stage.

Members of the audience may have then responded with our basic insecurities--those of "scale, sexuality, our status as more than beasts, and our tenuous individuality" (34).

The motives of the showmen in developing an effective presentation are obvious; the motives of the freaks themselves are not so apparent. One would think, because the Freak Show seems to be an exploitative and cruel enterprise, that the exhibits were either unaware of or unsatisfied by the content of their presentations. However, most of the people in the shows voluntarily exhibited themselves and their afflictions, fully conscious of the image being put forth to the public. They were considered showmen themselves; in many cases, they "actively participated in the construction of their freak creation" (Bogdan 267). They knew the acceptance and the admiration they received in the carnival world would not be equalled in "normal" society. It is not difficult to see why this sort of lifestyle appealed to them:

During its prime the freak show was a place where human deviance was valuable, and in that sense valued. Some [people] were exploited, it is true, but in the culture of the amusement world, most human oddities were accepted as showmen. They were congratulated for parlaying into an occupation what, in another context, might have been a burden.
(Bogdan 268)

To demonstrate the advantages of the Freak Show for people with abnormalities, an illuminating comparison can be made between John Merrick, the "Elephant Man" and Grace McDaniels, a woman who had similar disfigurements, yet exhibited herself in sideshows. Merrick, perhaps the most discussed and best known deformed person ever, led a life full of torment and loneliness. People regarded him either with disgust or as a medical curiosity, or both. Even the doctors who studied Merrick and were his only friends exhibited him at medical conventions in a way that could only have served to humiliate him (Fiedler 170-75). Grace McDaniels, who was as disfigured as Merrick, lived a happy life in the sideshow. She was often billed as the "Ugliest Woman in the World," and her ability to live a normal life, despite her appearance, was lauded (Bogdan 229). Edward G. Malone, owner of the world's largest collection of Freak Show memorabilia, reports that Grace "was attractive to a lot of men . . . I can't tell you how many proposals of marriage she received before she finally accepted a nice looking fellow who was very much in love with her" (qtd in Bogdan 229). Perhaps if Merrick had been exhibited as a wonder, instead of a specimen, he would have lived a less miserable life.

Using freaks or freakish characters to represent the human fear that we are not normal or that we do not belong is fairly common in literature. Most children have a natural fear of being treated different; therefore it is logical that literature written for children would reflect this trend. In the works of Lewis Carroll, for instance, we see the conventional notions of size, species, and self distorted, although we are assured by the author that the stories are either complete nonsense or only dreams. This

practice of reducing the unaccountable to fantasy has led those Victorians who deal with the Freak phenomenon of their time to be banished to the genre of fairy tales and seldom considered as serious writers. Hans Christian Andersen, for example, wrote 156 stories which were "meant only secondarily for children, and were addressed also to adults" (Davies 75). In his article on Andersen for the *Toronto Daily Star*, Davies notes "what a masterly prose writer Hans Andersen was. We very quickly discern, also that he did not write solely, or even primarily for children" (*Enthusiasms* 76). Davies explains that when the tales are properly translated from the Danish, as they had not been during the Victorian era, this difference is evident.

Few contemporaries of Carroll and Andersen dealt directly with freaks in their works, with the notable exceptions of Dickens, Mark Twain and Hugo. Dickens was as intrigued by the Freak Show as was the rest of Victorian England. *The Old Curiosity Shop* was inspired by the show freaks at the Greenwich Fair (Fielder 267), and contains among its characters an unusually tall man and a limbless woman. Twain was also fascinated by freaks, especially Siamese Twins (Harris 283). The concept of duplicity often appeared in his works, such as *The Prince and the Pauper* and "Pudd'nead Wilson, originally titled "Those Extraordinary Twins" (Fielder 268).

Victor Hugo, unlike Dickens and Mark Twain, and indeed, unlike any other author before the twentieth century, attempted to portray the freak from within. Fielder describes Hugo as "Freak-obsessed" (265) and notes that many of his monstrosities, including Quasimodo, were modelled on actual people with deformities (265). Hugo used Quasimodo to represent "the revolutionary terror below the surface

of Victorian optimism" and to suggest that while the terror might be suppressed for the moment, it would eventually emerge (267).

In the twentieth century, many authors have dealt directly with freaks. Carson McCullers in *Member of the Wedding*, "The Ballad of the Sad Cafe," and *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, Eudora Welty in "Keena, the Outcast Indian Maiden," and "The Petrified Man," Djuna Barnes in *Nightwood*, and Isak Dinesen in many of her short stories all dealt with freakish or actually deformed characters. But, as Ellen Moers notes in her 1974 article on female Gothic novelists, these writers dealt not with freaks who exhibit themselves in shows, but with freaks who function in society. As Fielder points out, the Gothic novel, usually a source of strange or freakish characters, has been "chiefly produced by authors who considered themselves, or were aware that other more secure than they looked upon them, as 'freakish'" (284).

CHAPTER IV

DUNSTAN'S SEARCH

The first fifty years of Dunstan Ramsay's life are spent in search of perfection. His hagiographical studies characterize the determination to find saintly perfection on earth. If *Fifth Business* is a study in hagiography, as John Bligh argues, who then is the saint? Terry Goldie, in his 1980 study, claims it is Dunstan Ramsay. Stephen Bonnycastle says, on the other hand, that Dunny is "much less admirable than has been suggested," but he agrees with Goldie on the following point: "growth takes place when a character adopts an appropriate parental figure as a role model" (22). Bligh disagrees with both readings: "Robertson Davies rejects in principle the idea that moral perfection is to be achieved through imitation of saints" (575-76). All these interpretations, I think, need to be pushed beyond the conventional definition of "saint." Goldie is accurate in his argument that Dunny is a saint; Bonnycastle is correct in stating that Dunny is more human than he is saintly; and Bligh's observation that Dunny, instead of becoming a saint, "pursues a strenuous moral ideal until late in his fifties . . . then undergoes a spiritual climacteric" (576), is valid. However, given the facts about what it means to be saint these observations are not as contradictory as they might appear. As Padre Blazon says, "If you think her a saint, she is a saint to you" (*FB* 178). Saints are what their followers want them to be. More importantly these holy people are, or were human beings. Because Dunny is concerned with

sainthood, he fails throughout most of his life to see the importance of being only human, and the imperfections and flaws which that condition--living with and acknowledging the full range of one's emotions--necessarily brings with it.

Several elements work together to influence Dunny's submergence in the world of hagiography. In Dunstan's childhood, he was taught that the slightest imperfection was a sign of weakness and probably the work of the Devil. His mother would not accept a son who veered from her idealized picture of the perfect family. She ran a strict household and expected her husband and sons to live and die by her every rule. Dunny also had expectations for the role of mother and his own mother did not live up to them. Just as she expected perfection from him, she taught him to expect it from her. Even as a child, he could not accept the two side of humanity, and his first confrontation with the duality of human nature is perhaps what hurled him into the rejection of this concept for the next forty years. Recalling the egg-stealing incident and his mother's violent reaction, followed by tearful forgiveness, he says,

How could I reconcile this motherliness with the screeching fury who had pursued me around the kitchen with a hip, flogging me until she was gorged with--what? Vengeance? . . . What I knew then was that nobody--not even my mother--was to be trusted in a strange world that showed very little of itself on the surface. (*FB* 40)

What, as a child, Dunny failed to consider was the possibility that these two pictures of motherhood could be reconciled.

In an effort to find this perfection Dunny turns to *A Child's Book of Saints*. In the saints he finds the flawlessness he was trained to look for but could not find at home. The saints in the legends are always noble, and always, in the end, they act in God's cause. Dunny does, however, realize that the legends are just "tales of wonders," and he compares them to the *Arabian Nights*. Perhaps he is aware that moral perfection cannot be achieved by a human being, and this is why he turns to the legends as a child.

His experiences in the war also influence Dunny's delving into the study of saints. After the war he is awarded the Victoria Cross for his extreme bravery. However, he knows that his actions were not entirely heroic. As John Bligh points out, Dunny's "exploit at Passchendale" illustrates for him "the underside of heroism" (580). When he accepts his medal he thinks,

Here I am, being decorated as a hero, and in the eyes of everybody here I am indeed a hero; but I know that my heroic act was rather a dirty job I did when I was dreadfully frightened; I could just as easily have muddled it and been ingloriously killed. But it doesn't much matter, because people seem to need heroes. (*FB* 90)

What Dunny is not conscious of at this point is that he could easily apply this statement to himself. People do need heroes, and Dunny is no exception. Having debunked his own heroism, thereby making all other conventional heroes suspect, he goes off in search of heroes that cannot, he thinks, be questioned: he goes to the community of saints.

Dunny's personal life is also indicative of his need to search for perfection. He remains a bachelor his entire life and gathers few close friends along the way. On the subject of marriage he says, "I had no intention of being anybody's own dear laddie, ever again" (*FB* 92). This can be interpreted to mean, as he thinks it does, that he wants to retain his independence, but because he directly associates the situation not just with his mother, but also, as he indicates by invoking her exact words, with the scene in which he first saw the dark side of her, it could also indicate that he wants to avoid being faced with a similar discovery in the future.

Romantic entanglements are not the only close ties Dunny avoids. Until his late fifties, when he meets Liesl and reencounters Paul, he has only one lasting relationship with anyone other than Mary Dempster: Boy Staunton. Dunny remains close to Boy because in this relationship he risks losing nothing. He harbors no high ideals regarding Boy's character. Boy treats everyone badly all the time. His reaction to his wife's death, his relationship with his children, and his quest for executive and political power are all predictable. Boy is incapable of shocking Dunstan, and this makes Boy safe company. His relationship with Boy is attractive to Dunstan on another level as well. The guilt he carries because of the snowball incident will never be shared by Boy, as Dunny thinks it should be. Dunny then remains, the "keeper of the stone," the one who knows the secret that is key to the story, and this is a secret he likes keeping. By heaping unpurged guilt on himself, he is able to view himself as unworthy and emotionally ostracize himself even further from society. His secret is too horrible, and he feels he must suffer by keeping silent. When he becomes an adult

and rediscovers hagiography as a hobby, his motives are again to closet himself from that which is real and unpredictable. He says, "I was a happy goat who had wandered into the wondrous enclosed garden of hagiology, and I grazed greedily and contentedly" (*FB* 129).

In his effort to find perfection, Dunny also turns to Mary Dempster. In Mary, Dunny finds a mother who is incapable of turning on him as his own mother had done. Even after Rev. Dempster and Mrs. Ramsay forbid him to, he continues to spend his afternoons keeping Mary and Paul company. But Paul, being ten years younger than Dunny, and no longer able to serve as an audience, holds little attraction; the attraction is his mother. Mrs. Dempster, as strange as she is, possesses a placidity that cannot be shaken by outside events. She is always sweet, kind, and loving; the ideal mother. As R. L. Radford notes in his study of Jung's influence on Davies, "Even though her behavior and the values it implies abhorred by her society, and she is made an outcast, she remains at peace with herself" (68).

Through his association with Mary Dempster, Dunny is given another opportunity to reject his place in society. Even long after Mary's death, he continues to insist that he had two motives for assuming her as a responsibility. Both motives, to assuage his guilt and to somehow have her canonized as his personal saint, are selfish. Refusing to admit to his heroism in her cause helps him to remain closed off and unemotional. Later in the novel, Liesl will tell him that his reluctance to concede to his heroism is another device he uses to push himself away from humanity: "You take on the care of a poor madwoman you knew as a boy. . . . And you are secret and

stiff-rumped about it all, and never admit it is damned good of you. That is not very human" (*FB* 229). If Dunny is a hero, then heroes may not be the perfect beings he thinks they are, and he does not want to fact that.

Father Regan tells Dunny there is no hope for the canonization of Mary, because she is what he calls a fool-saint: "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" (*FB* 143). This definition well suits Dunny's purposes because it pushes the fool-saint to the fringes of humanity. Unable to think or reason, Mary Dempster does good only because she sees good as the only option. Therefore, she does not possess the burden of temptation most saints must battle. The dark side of her nature will never fly at Dunny in a blind rage as his mother's did, because Mary Dempster does not possess a dark side. She is a fool. John Bligh believes that "In her simplicity, Mary Dempster follows the first principle of biblical morality, that charity overrides all other obligations" (581). While agreeing with that general idea, I do not agree with the implication that Mary is capable of making any choices regarding her obligations. When she "saves" Joel Surgeoner in the gravel pit, she has no concrete motives; she says only, "He was very civil, 'Masa. And he wanted it so badly" (*FB* 52). Mary is not implying here that she considered her duties and decided that having sex with a stranger was the best option; he wanted her to, and because he was "civil," she did. Mary seeks only to please, offers unconditional love, and expects simple kindness in return. To Dunny, therefore, she is a saint, or what he thinks a saint to be: the perfect human being.

Dunny is able to sustain his close relationship with Mary because of her apparent lack of humanity. However, when she proves to have retained at least a portion of herself below her cover of madness, their union is ended. The cause of Mrs. Dempster's unleashed fury is her long buried mothering instinct. She flies at Dunstan in a rage that equals his mother's frenzy of many years before:

She rushed at me and tried to scratch my yes. I was at a great disadvantage, for I was alarmed and unnerved by the storm I had caused, and also my reverence for Mrs. Dempster was so great that i could not bear to be rough with her. . . . what followed was a half-hour of confusion, during which I explained to the doctor what the trouble was, and Mrs. Dempster was put to bed under what they called restraint--straps--with an injection of something to quiet her. (*FB* 236)

From this point on she is lost to Dunny. This event is central to Dunstan's eventual reconciliation with his own humanity. When he bends to sniff Mary Dempster's dead body for the "true odour of sanctity," and smells only Chanel Number Five, he realizes that even in Mary perfection cannot be found. He then continues his journey in the world of hagiography, perhaps in the hopes of finding such perfection in an unearthly realm.

Dunstan's brief association with Diana Marfleet also figures in his retreat to saintly scholarship. In Diana, Dunstan finds the same paradox he found within his mother. Her name is the first indication that she will represent, at least in part, a mother figure. The Greek goddess for whom Diana is named is the goddess of

childbirth and fertility; Joseph Campbell calls her "the mother of all things" (63). Diana wants to marry Dunstan, although he loves her, he fears a closer relationship with her would reveal flaws in her that he could not bear to see. Radford Believes these fears stem from Dunstan's association of Diana with a mother figure: "Ramsay's Diana is both the Pieta and the Terrible Mother. As nurse and comforter she is the former; perceived by his mother-ridden psyche as his new creatrix and would be possessor, she is the latter" (70). In reducing Dunstan's rejection of Diana to a fear of the mother, Radford neglects the concept that Dunstan simply cannot face the thought of purity and corruption dwelling in the same being. That good and evil can coexist peacefully frightens Dunstan for two reasons: he is terrified he will find evil in himself, and he is worried that he will never be able to find the perfect saint for whom he searches. Therefore, from Diana, he must move on.

After meeting Padre Blazon, Dunstan takes a significant step forward in understanding the true nature of humanity. Blazon takes great pleasure in ridiculing his own profession and Dunstan's hobby. The coming of old age has caused Blazon to want something more than Christianity has given him; yet he remains a faithful believer. When Dunstan visits him for the last time, Blazon says he has finally found a God who will teach him how to be an old man: ". . . He is the very best company. Very calm, very quiet, but gloriously alive: we do, but He is. Not in the least a proselytizer or a careerist, like His sons" (*FB* 254).

The tenants of Christianity dictate that Jesus Christ was perfect, and while Blazon does not completely reject this, he does express some dissatisfaction with it. He complains,

I am sometimes very conscious of the fact that I following the path of a leader who dies when He was less than half as old as I am now. . . . All Christ's teaching is put forth with the dogmatism, the certainty, and the strength of youth: I need something that takes account of the accretion of experience the sense of paradoxical ambiguity that comes with years.
(*FB* 180-81)

The expression of these doubts, colored by a lasting faith, is emblematic of Blazon's whole character. To Dunstan, he is a mentor in hagiography, and, by Blazon's own account, somewhat of a saint himself. His birth came as an answer to his devout mother's prayers, and as a child and adolescent he was "studious, obedient, intelligent and chaste." Like many of the saints to whom he would devote his life, Blazon was "too good to be true." He was so good, in fact, that his lack of imperfections caused the Jesuits to mistrust him (*FB* 179).

Blazon, though, also has a dark side. His torment of the nuns who nurse him, his delight in Dunstan's lewd stories, even his last name, indicate an affiliation with a darker power. Blazon is not afraid to recognize this sign that he is a human being, and he encourages Dunny to do the same: "Forgive yourself for being a human creature, Ramezay. This is the beginning of wisdom; that is part of what is meant by the fear of God: and for you it is the only way to save your sanity" (*FB* 182).

Blazon's influence is a significant factor in convincing Dunny to explore the full range of his personality, but to facilitate a complete discovery this must be aided by a character who possesses an even greater paradox.

Liesl is perhaps the most important character in Dunny's life. Physically, she is a hideous woman, and this is never lost on Dunny. He says she is "the ugliest human creature I had ever seen" (*FB* 209), but he soon comes to view her as "a woman of captivating intellect and charm, cruelly imprisoned in a deformed body" (213). Liesl, however, remains an ambiguous figure to Dunny. He is first repulsed, then charmed, then repulsed again. This constant ambiguity is the embodiment of the duality of human nature, an idea that is stressed throughout the novel. Goldie claims that Liesl "is like St. Uncumber in being a powerful woman whose gender is at times ambiguous" (24-25).

Although it is important, Liesl's power in the novel should not be limited to her androgyny. Liesl's character calls more than one conventional boundary into question. Originally though, for Dunny, there is the question of her of her sexual identity. She wears men's clothing, is tall and very strong, has big hands and feet, and a general "heaviness of bone" (209). As their business relationship puts them in regular contact, Dunstan discovers she is the "autocrat of the company" (213). Magnus is the star, but Liesl is the force that makes his stardom possible. She is the financial backer and the principal mechanic. This arrangement is a reversal of the stereotypical roles of men and women and it makes Dunny uncomfortable. The final blow to this opinion of her comes when Dunny finds Liesl and Faustina in a sexual

embrace. He then suffers a complete "collapse of the spirit" (*FB* 224) and his feelings shift from repulsion to hatred. He does not hate Liesl because of his high moral sense, or because he thought he was in love with Faustina; he hates Liesl because she forces him to rethink a condition which he liked to think was fixed; sexual identity.

Liesl does not allow him to ruminate on this hatred, however, for she immediately challenges him. Visiting him that night, she gives him the lecture that will ultimately push him back into the human race, from which she thinks he has been absent. But first, she attempts to seduce him. He is appalled by this not so much because of her ugliness, but because she is, in his mind, trying to step back over the line she had crossed when he found her with Faustina. He fights her with all his strength, indeed, as he would fight another man, trying in a vain attempt to push her back into his traditional categories. When he wins the fight and she flees from his room, he thinks "a great cloud seemed to have lifted from my spirit, and though it was too soon to be sure, I thought that perhaps my reason, such as it was, had begun to climb back into the saddle and that with care I might soon be myself again" (*FB* 228). Although he does not admit to himself, Dunny is not so concerned with being himself, but with restoring order to the world around him. Liesl has disturbed this order with her androgyny, and he has physically and symbolically pushed her from his view.

Liesl, however, will not be silenced. She returns to cross yet another boundary--the boundary between good and evil. Liesl's greatest ambiguity lies not in her sexuality, but in her character itself. Dunny thinks of her as the Devil, or at the very least one of his demons. He even twists her nose during their fight, recalling his

namesake, St. Dunstan, grabbing the Devil's nose in his tongs (*FB* 97). But the advice she gives him that night in his room is heartfelt and caring, delivered unselfishly and with a great deal of charity. Given that she has just been beaten soundly, her return to the battle scene is also rather heroic. This challenges Dunstan's ideas of good and evil. He had placed Liesl firmly in the realm of the Devil, and her gesture confuses this placement.

The advice she gives Dunstan is also ambiguous. She originally tells him how inhuman it is to refuse to admit he has treated the people in his life with decency. When it seems to the reader and to Dunny that she will be attempting to convince him to openly confront his good side, she tells him just the opposite:

You should take a look at the side of your life you have not lived. . . . 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. You must even get to know his father, the Old 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. (*FB* 230-31)

Dunstan then does something he feels is at the Devil's bidding: he sleeps with Liesl. He has crossed this boundary now himself and made love to a woman whom he cannot firmly place, sexually, mentally, or emotionally. It is his biggest step in becoming the full human being we see in *World of Wonders*.

Perhaps the most significant sign of the profound change in Dunstan is his new view of the saints: "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" (*WW* 688-89). Dunstan Ramsay has ceased his search for perfection. He has realized, through the help of several not so saintly saints, and one not so freakish freak, that to view life from all sides and accept the duality of human nature is much more fulfilling than to view it from only one.

CHAPTER FIVE

PAUL'S JOURNEY

Paul Dempster must make a journey similar to Dunstan Ramsay's. Paul's journey, however, is begun from the other side. He must accept the good and decent side of human and of himself. Paul's early childhood training is of the same character as Dunny's, only in a more extreme version. This extremity causes Paul not to search for perfection as Dunny did, but to consign himself to the dark side of humanity. Paul's father gives him the Bible and punishes him severely for any action that does not specifically adhere to its teachings. Paul's only pleasure in life, his association with Dunstan, is taken away from him. His father says that playing cards are "the Devil's picture-book" (*FB* 46). When Paul chooses his profession it is not only in direct defiance of his father's teachings, but it is an attempt to run towards the evil of which he feels he is guilty. Amasa Dempster also tells his son, "after a beating and much prayer," that "the veneration of saints is one of the vilest superstitions of the child has been beaten into "conviction of his own wickedness" (*FB* 46). As a small child, being told not only that you are wicked, but also that your only friend is trying to lead you astray, and that listening to stories about people devoted to God is blasphemous, could have done nothing but confuse Paul about the categories of good and evil.

The signals Paul received from the townspeople also served to blur his conception of right and wrong. The villagers screamed cruel taunts at Paul's mother, and by association, at him as well. When Paul speaks of his childhood in Deptford he recalls Psalm 79:

We are become a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us. Yes! Yes, there we were! The Dempsters, a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and a derision to the whole village of Deptford. (*WW 572*)

O remember not against us former iniquities: for we are brought very low. But as soon as I put my nose in the schoolyard they would remember my former iniquities against me. God's tender mercies had never reached the Deptford schoolyard. (*WW 573*)

It is significant that Paul should recall this verse because it demonstrates that, by the age of ten, he had convinced himself he was a "reproach" and a "derision" and guilty of "iniquities." He did not blame the children who tormented him; he merely accepted that he was a proper target for torment.

The opinion Paul formed about his mother further confused his already troubled morality. His mother, who showed him affection and love, was considered so wicked she was confined to her home by a rope. Paul knew only that she had "some very bad instincts, and our family suffered for it" (*WW 572*). Later in *World of Wonders* Paul will add that his father had told him his birth was the cause of his

mother's madness. Throughout his life he has acted indifferent when his mother is mentioned, but here he says,

When your mother bore you she went down in her anguish to the very gates of Death, in order that you might have life. Nothing that you could do subsequently would work off your birth-debt to her. No degree of obedience, no unfailing love, could put the account straight.

Your guilt to her was a burden you carried all your life. (638)

Paul may be speaking of all children in this instance, but his debt is even greater because his mother never returned from the "gates of Death." Before Paul ever ventured inside the carnival, he was utterly convinced he was an evil child. Jurgen Lind observes of Paul's journey into the carnival,

The possessions of the soul are very powerful, but there must have been something else. I smell it. The Bible obsession must somehow have supported the obsession with the conjurer. Not even a great revelation wipes out a childhood's indoctrination; the two must have come together some way. (578)

Paul would agree with Jurgen; he believes his own wickedness came together with the wickedness he believed was in the carnival.

Initially the carnival world only deepened in Paul the conviction that he was inherently evil. His rape at the hands of Willard is his direct encounter with the performers. Even while being sodomized, he feels shame as strongly as physical pain. Part of the shame derives from the incident he will later share only with Dunny. He

assumes, both as a child and as an adult, that his complicitous smile following Willard's sexual caress is proof of his penchant for evil. From this traumatic and troubling beginning, Paul enters the world of carnival freaks, where he will learn a great deal about the nature of evil, although this education will be no less confusing than that which has come before it.

The knowledge that appearance and reality are often far apart is a significant lesson learned during Paul's carnival stint. As the unsophisticated mechanism inside Abdullah's sophisticated appearance, Paul gets this information very soon in his education. This device, the gaff, is a crucial element to the freak show, as Paul quickly discovers:

Gaff. Than that was a word I had to learn at once, in all its refinements. The gaff was the element of deception in an exhibition, and though all the Talent would have admitted your couldn't manage without it, there was a moral stigma attached to it. (WW 610)

Paul himself is a gaff, so, as in his previous life, he is tagged as a less than moral person. Later in his life, both as Sir John's double and as a famous magician, he will continue to be the element of deception, and thus be stigmatized.

The people Paul lives with for the next ten years also have a great influence on his views of humanity. Traditionally, freaks are considered as difference from normal people as it is possible to be; but Paul sees that their abnormalities do not prohibit them from exhibiting the same characteristics present among normal groups of people. There is a competition among them from the top spot in the tent. Indeed, this

competition regarding who is the most abnormal is unusual in normal society, but it is merely an example of human beings striving to be honored for their accomplishments. Hannah, in her fight with Andro, says that "If a natural, educational wonder like herself, without any gaff about her, didn't take precedence over a gaffed monstrosity she was prepared to leave carnival life and despair of the human race" (*WW* 617).

The freaks also have a sense of community. When Joe Dark kills Rango, the World of Wonders bands together to comfort Heinie. Professor Spencer makes a speech regarding "the link between Man and the Lesser Creation, which was nowhere so strong or so truly understood as in circuses and carnivals" (*WW* 671-71). They had, Spencer says, come to esteem Rango as one of themselves, and though they bickered and fought amongst themselves most of the time, in time of tragedy, they, like most communities, stood together. Paul observed all this, and since it was his first interactive experience with other people, learned from these freaks how human beings interact with one another.

Although the influence of the community as a whole is significant, the effects of the carnival on Paul's view of humanity can be better explored through the individual freaks. Willard, the character who is the most blatantly negative, plays an important role in confusing Paul's sense of good and evil. He continues to abuse Paul sexually throughout most of the eight years they are together. He cares little about the child's welfare, feeding and clothing him only minimally. Yet he is, in a very real sense, Paul's savior. Although the reason he takes Paul from Deptford is abhorrent, it is the means by which Paul is eventually able to become Magnus Eisengrim, the

persona he feels is his true identity. Upon meeting Boy for the first time as an adult, he tells him, "My real name is Magnus Eisengrim; that is who I am and that is how the world knows me. But before I found out who I was I was called Paul Dempster" (*FB* 263).

Not only does Willard enable Paul to leave Deptford, but he also gives him a profession: "what Willard taught me saved my reason. Certainly it is at the root of anything I can do now" (*WW* 522). Paul feels he is, regardless of his hatred for Willard, indebted to him. When he leaves America he takes Willard with him. During the retelling of his life story in *World of Wonders*, Paul insinuates that his was primarily a selfish act: "Still, his life lay in my power. A smallish extra injection some day would have disposed of him. But I couldn't do it. Or rather . . . I didn't really want to do it because I got a special sort of satisfaction from his presence" (*WW* 679). David Monaghan, in his article on public figures in the trilogy argues that "Magnus fails to give a convincing enough explanation of his treatment of Willard" to assure Dunstan, and the reader, that it was not an act of vengeance (54). Monaghan is correct. In fact, when asked this question by Dunstan, Paul offers no explanation at all (*WW* 850). However, Monaghan believes this to be a failure on Davies' part to reconcile the metaphor of the wolf with the rest of Magnus' character (55). I argue that the omission here is deliberate. Whether or not Paul acted out of vengeance in withholding death from Willard may be better left an open question. It is certainly a question to Paul.

This is evidenced by the different accounts Paul gives of Willard. In *Fifth Business*, speaking only to Dunny and Boy, Paul says, "I begged him to take me" (263). In describing the same incident in *World of Wonders*, he tells of the rape and says only, "I thought I was being killed" (580). Of his taking Willard to Europe he says, in the first novel, "I had a loyalty to his dreadful, inescapable need" (264), and in the third novel, "I got a special sort of satisfaction from his presence" (679). The contradiction of these descriptions is not as important as the fact that Paul seems to have accepted the idea that one action, or one person, can be both good and evil at the same time. His last comment on Willard demonstrates this: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink; for thou shalt hep coals of fire on his head, and the Lord shall reward thee. Indeed so. The Lord rewarded me richly, and it seemed to me the Lord's face was dark and gleeful as he did so" (*WW* 679).

Next to Willard, Happy Hannah is the most influential freak in Paul's life. Traditionally, "Fat Ladies have apparently proved as cheerful and amiable in private as they are presented in public" (Fiedler 129-30). Hannah certainly does not conform to this stereotype. But she is a paradox. She is the only member of the sideshow concerned about evil and its forces, yet she is by far the most hateful and disagreeable. She was "an interferer, a tireless asserter of opinions, and--worst of all--a determined Moral Influence" (*WW* 612). Hannah is determined, unlike her fellow performers, to challenge the unflattering stereotype that fair-goers have of the freaks. She will not

accept her role as freak, and perhaps this is why she is so loudly unhappy. Hannah's excuse for her exhibition is that she is doing the work of the Lord:

Yes, friends, I am here not as a curiosity and certainly not as a monstrosity, but to attest in my daily life and in my public career to the Lord's abounding grace. I don't hafta be here; many offers from missionary societies have been turned down in order that I may get around this whole continent and talk to the biggest possible audience of the real people, God's own folks, and attest to the Faith. (*WW* 618)

Much of her speech may be directed toward the crowd, but Paul insists she was, in her private life as well, true to her Bible and "determined to drive Smut back into its loathsome den" (677).

Hannah reinforces the ideas Paul received in his childhood. She is highly moral and lives according to biblical teaching; yet she is the most meanspirited person in Paul's life. It is impossible for Paul to decide, as a child, whether or not Hannah is a good figure or an evil one; but as an adult this question has ceased to matter. He sees that she can, as most humans do, embody both conditions. Which side she appears to be on depends on how one looks at her, as Kinghoven observes: "The Devil? Balls! God? Balls! Get me that Fat Woman and I'll photograph her one way and you'll know the Devil mad her, then I'll photograph her another way and you'll swear you see the work of God" (*WW* 635).

The other freaks who populate the World of Wonders have minor but no less confusing impacts on Paul's young mind. Professor Spencer was a friend and a

teacher to Paul, but because, mentally, he was less a freak than his peer were, "people were often embarrassed by him" (*WW* 621). Andro the hermaphrodite serves to worsen Paul's confusion about sex roles, begun by his experiences with Willard. However, Leslie Fiedler claims that hermaphrodites forces their audiences to "accept that there are not two physiological sexes, but many" (190). Perhaps Paul's exposure to Andro helps him in learning to understand the often blurred categories of humanity. Heinie, with his love for Rango, also helps Paul in this way. Rango and Heinie represent the tenuous boundary between man and beast which we will later see in Paul's first meeting with Liesl and in Faustina, who is "an animal" (*FB* 222). All the freaks in the *World of Wonders* stress, through their actions and through their characters, that they are above all human, with the many contradictions present in humanity.

The next great influence in Paul's life comes from Sir John Tresize and his wife, Milady. Paul's first description of Milady demonstrates that she is like the saints and the freaks: whatever her public wants her to be: "Some people thought her pretentious, and some thought the romance that surround her was frowsy, and people always made certain amount of fund of her, and she was a cult figure as well" (*WW* 702). Paul immediately falls in love with her, despite her age and appearance, probably because, he says, "she was the only woman I had ever known who seemed to like me, and thin I was of any interest or value" (791). Once again, Paul is told by society that the person who is nice to him--his mother, Professor Spencer, and now Milady--is someone to be made fun of. But here, for the first time, Paul does not let

society color his opinions. He remains loyal and affectionate to Milady throughout her life and long after her death. Paul's experience in the carnival has taught him what good can lie inside a strange or freakish exterior.

Sir John represents a saintly figure in Paul's life. Robert G. Lawrence, in his account of Canadian theater in *World of Wonders*, tells us that Sir John is based on an actual British actor, Sir John Martin-Harvey (114). Lawrence goes on to say that Davies chose this man as the basis for Sir John because "he needed a figure combining a substantial almost heroic stature, albeit with true-to-life warts, and a quality of idealism" (122). Lawrence's observation can be built on by applying the metaphor of the saint. Sir John embodied the paradox of sainthood for those around him, especially Paul. He was a legendary actor, always keeping the persona, both on stage and off. Yet his encroaching old age, his gouty foot, and his refusal to accept the modern theater pull him down to earth and make him human.

From Sir John, Paul learns his stage persona. He mimics Sir John's every move, in a way that Roly Ingestree describes as despicable: "You sucked the pith out of that poor old ham, and gobbled it up and made it a part of yourself. It was a very nasty process." Paul on the other hand, sees the process differently: "I simply wanted to be like him. . . . Nobody can steal another man's ego, but he can learn from it, and I learned" (*WW* 760). Paul, of course, could be lying here, but even if Roly's interpretation is correct, Paul's doubling for Sir John remains a paradox. No matter what Paul's intentions were, even if they were evil, his presence in Sir John's life and in his plays prolonged the actor's career and gave him the final successful tour which

he so desired. The nature of Paul's time with the Tresizes matters not to Paul; only the action itself concerns him. In one of his final references to Sir John and the company he says, " All we can do is try to be as sure as we can of what we are going, so far as it relates to ourselves. In fact, not to flail about and be the deluded victims of our passions. If you're going to do something that looks like evil, don't smear it with icing and pretend it's good; just bloody well do it and keep your eyes peeled" (787-88).

Before Paul met the Tresizes he called himself "a bottle in the smoke" (683) ready to be filled. During his tenure with the carnival, where he is not valued and the thoughts of his own wickedness are reinforced, there is nothing to fill this bottle but hatred, both for himself and for the world. He says: "My reasoning was simple, and of a very common kind: if I were a hoo and a crook, were not whoredom and dishonesty the foundations upon which humanity rested? If I were on the outs with God . . . was anyone else near him? If they were, they must be cheating" (WW 658). However, after Paul's experiences with the acting company, he seems to have recognized that people and actions appearing to be wholly wicked simply need to be viewed from another angle, from which they will appear wholly good; he says, "Sir John and Milady were the first two people in my life I really loved" (817). He was now able to love and feel real affection for other human beings, a step he had to take toward feeling these things for himself. This step is advanced by his next significant meeting: the meeting with Liesl.

When Paul first encounters Liesl he thinks her an animal. Even after he has determined her true species, he continues to treat her as a monkey. Consequently, she behaves as one, attacking and biting while cursing in her own strange language (*WW* 829). The lines between animal and human have been crossed as they often were in the freak shows, and Liesl, as she takes over the narration and describes her physical appearance, shows us that she would have done well on the freak show circuit. Her disease was controlled by doctors who congratulated themselves on having halted her height, but "at the cost of looking like an ape." With her "huge feet and hands, disfiguring thickening of the skull and jaw, and surely one of the ugliest faces anyone has ever seen" (*WW* 830), Liesl would have been a fortunate find for any carnival manager.

But, of course, this was not her fate, although it might have been had she not met Paul. From Liesl, Paul acquires a power he has never had; he becomes the mentor, and she the student. Paul teaches her how to speak properly and how to repair the automata. He treats her as a human being, as no one has done for many years. Liesl claims that she was attracted to his "Magian World View:"

a sense of the unfathomable wonder of the invisible 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 ungratefully as a stroke of luck. It was 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. (*WW* 835)

For Liesl, this meant she could trust Paul to see what lay beneath her hideous exterior, while still keeping that hideous exterior in mind. Liesl fell in love with Paul then, and her sexual initiation helped her learn to reconcile her appearance with her mind.

Knowing that she could attract the man she wanted gave her the confidence to stop acting like an animal and become a human being again: "I became quite smart, in so far as my appearance allowed, and paid attention to my hair . . . I began to eat at the family table again, and when he had guests I could be so charming that they almost forgot how I looked" (*WW* 839).

Paul was equally helped through his association with Liesl. Goldie says that, for Dunstan, sleeping with Liesl was "a reconciliation of the usual dualism of good and evil" (24). This observation can also be applied to Paul. Sleeping with Liesl forced him finally to drop the categories--animal and human, man and woman, and most significantly, good and evil. Due to his childhood and carnival experiences, Paul tended to see only the evil, but the friendship and love he received from Liesl, the freak, taught him to see both, not just in the present, but also when he looked back on the past.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The journeys of Dunstan Ramsay and Paul Dempster include several saints and several freaks. Davies uses the two extreme groups of people to represent the duality of human nature. If these two groups, one perceived by society as wholly good and the other as wholly wicked, have significant similarities, then surely all human beings do. One important piece of evidence to support the claim that this was Davies' intent is the presence of the bearded St. Uncumber, the only object of Dunstan's studies that is mentioned by name. St. Uncumber is a real saint officially canonized by the Catholic Church and the legend Dunstan reports about her is the actual legend that has always surround her name (Delahaye 87). The fact that Davies searched to find a real saint that was also a freak is evidence that he was setting up a comparison between the two groups.

St. Uncumber represents not only the comparison of freaks and saints, but also the ambiguous reality in physically normal people. Leslie Fiedler reports that witches have often been portrayed as bearded, citing as example the three witches in *Macbeth* (143). Fiedler also says, in concurrence with Dunny, that the legend of St. Uncumber was developed to explain the statue of an apparently hermaphroditic Christ (Fiedler 145, *FB* 147). Bearded ladies were a popular sideshow attraction because they, as

Liesl does in the novels, challenged a distinction essential to society's customary expectations about, in this case, the distinctions of gender.

The saints and the freaks challenge many distinctions--male and female, animal and human, normal and deviant--but perhaps the most important distinction explored in the texts is between good and evil. In Christian mythology, this concept, taken to its extreme, will lead to the distinction between God and the Devil. The characters in the *Deptford Trilogy* discuss this distinction on several occasions. In *Fifth Business*, Blazon says, "On the whole, we treat the Devil shamefully, and the worse we treat him the more he laughs at us" (254). In *World of Wonders*, Dunstan explains his reason for not joining Roly's toast to the Devil:

I've been thinking a great deal about the Devil lately, and I have been wondering if humour isn't one of the most brilliant inventions of the Devil. . . . It diminishes the horrors of the past and it veils the horrors of the present, and therefore it prevents us from seeing straight, and perhaps from learning things we ought to know. (263)

Generally, Christianity does not give the Devil the respect or attribute to him the power Blazon and Dunny seem to think he deserves. Joseph Campbell explains that this disregard for evil is common only to modern religions and is not usually present in primitive forms of worship. As evidence, Campbell discusses the Trickster figure who appears in many primitive faiths. The trickster is "A fool, and a cruel lecherous cheat, an epitome of the principle of disorder--but also the culture-bringer," and he is therefore, respected (273).

The concept that the Devil should be taken more seriously is eventually, in the *Deptford Trilogy*, elevated to the concept that God and the Devil may be different parts of the same entity. Blazon says, "The Devil knows corners of us all of which Christ himself is ignorant. Indeed, I am sure Christ learned a great deal about Himself when He met the Devil in the wilderness. Of course, that was a meeting of brothers; people forget too readily that Satan is Christ's elder brother and has certain advantages in argument that pertain to a senior" (*FB* 253). Alan Watts, in his study on the myths of polarity, takes Blazon's observation further to point that God and the Devil are not parts of the same entity, but actually one. Watts uses the Tibetan Book of the Dead for the source of this concept. He explains:

For the person who flees from the light of the beatific aspect of the Buddhas there now follows the wrathful or horrendous aspect. . . . Many would see these as demons or devils--but they are only the Peaceful Deities in changed aspect. . . . *Demon est deus inversus*--the Devil is God inverted--the two are one, seen from opposite points of view. (99)

Watts explains that this concept can be applied to any religion, including Christianity. He claims it is impossible for any being to be completely pure or completely corrupted, for this would mean total annihilation for the being (97).

Watts also applies the theory that many characters in the *Deptford Trilogy* express--that recognizing one's personal devils is a healthy act--to Christian mythology: "the very fact that the name of the angel of evil is Lucifer, the light-bearer

suggests that there might be something formative and creative in becoming conscious of one's own evil principle, or dark side . . ." (17). The experiences that Dunny and Paul undergo exemplify not only this concept but the concept that it is just as formative to recognize one's own principle of goodness, and live not, as Paul did, convinced that the whole of humanity, including himself, was irretrievably wicked. Paul is a freak; there can be no doubt about that, either to him or to the reader. He practices a profession that revolves around deceiving the public and making his audiences believe he is in line with the Devil, or at least practicing black magic. But here should also be little doubt about the fact that Paul is a saint as well. He "saves" Liesl from her inevitable life as an ostracized animal, he literally gives up his identity to further the careers and prolong the happiness of the Tresizes, and he mercifully does not leave Willard behind in America when it would have been so convenient to do so. He exhibits the same kind of charity his mother did, but, unlike her, he is conscious of his actions.

Dunny, on the other hand, might be very easily cast in the role of saint, his compassionate treatment of the people in his life and his humility regarding his own actions give him a saintly aura. But Dunny, like Paul, is not one or the other; he too is both. His missing leg physically moves him toward the realm of the freaks, while his Protestant obsession with Catholic saints emotionally places him there. These oddities place Dunny outside the mainstream in which he believes, for better or for worse, he is firmly entrenched. Davies uses the saints and the freaks--groups whose definitions eventually encompass every character in the novel--with their extreme

characteristics, to demonstrate both the duality of human nature and that accepting this duality is what it means to be human.

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