

One of the joys of semi-retirement is the occasional reading of a spot or spate of novels--in the case of this thinksheet, The Deptford Trilogy of Canada's most-heralded living literatus, Robertson Davies. It (FIFTH BUSINESS [FB], THE MANTICORE [M], and WORLD OF WONDERS [WW]), + a vol. introducing the author and by the author (ONE HALF OF ROBERTSON DAVIES [OH]), were given me in Chappaqua a few-weeks ago by Geraldine and Len Rubin; and this thinksheet is preparation for my meeting with last year's Midlife Exploration group (incl. Geraldine) this coming weekend (late Mar. '81).

1. I surprised myself! I read every word, and made extensive indexes. The man is, as the Rubins had said, a soul-mate of mine: passionate, humorous, serious, reveling in thought-food like a pig in slop, joyfully in love with "all sorts and conditions of [sic] pardon me and the Prayer Book] men," a theological sleuth with a delicate moral nose. I hate him only for having some wrong ideas: otherwise I love him.
2. Wrong idea #1: Cosmic lex talionis (i.e., life, or whatever or whoever, takes vengeance on us each and all for our turpitudes of heart (attitude) and hand (action)). In short and in low, you get yours and I get mine. If you're on an Eastern kick you'll be calling it Karma (in Sanskrit, "action-result"). RD is delightfully sophisticated (as well as maddeningly, irresponsibly, so), but the central moral principle of his life and work is simple-minded (bad sense), a Greeky form of Deuteronomism: the evil, by cosmic-historic reflex, get theirs. Since he writes in the sardonic key, which offends no sophisticates, he fails to draw the logic of the other side: less whole and full-bodied than Scripture, he does not picture the good getting theirs (for that would give his neo-Gothic novels too close a smell to the Gothic novels of 19th-c. Britain). The metaphysical dimension of this would be stronger belief in the Devil than in God; and sure 'nuff, it applies. While much is said about God, most of it is in the past and oppressive senses: while much more is said about the Devil, all of it is in the present and existential sense. Conclusion: The Devil died, then God died, then the Devil revived first. Oh, well; I'd rather the Devil be back without God than to try to get along with neither.
3. RD seduces us into re-belief in the numinous and the romantic. How wonderful, and how necessary to our soul's nurture and health! He's slipped in Jung where the Bible was; but the reff. to Jung (OH.126ff,142,192,225,236,244,263; FB.177,182,226,249,254,268; M.Contents,6,9,20,68,71, 92f,101,136,153,174,179, 228ff,251,260,267,292,296f; WW.140,153,306) are 6 less than the reff. to the Bible--in add. to which the vols. are saturated with Scripture language and unquoted Scripture clauses and sentences. In short, RD has a hate/love affair with the Bible, and is glad Jung lets him be an atheist without (as Freud would insist) jettisoning Holy Writ. He calls himself a "moralist" (OH.16,131) and (without credit-line) uses Jesus sow/reap as his life-verse; but this denying theism while holding to its implicates is immoral. It is trying to have your cake while rejecting the baker (God, Jesus, Church-church). It is high-level, artiste dilettantism. I hate it and thoroughly enjoy it--which also may be immoral, but I think not. In OH, he calls himself a "dualist" (209) and "probably a gnostic" (209). But in one passage (243ff) in which he says "art and literature...sustained me," he confesses that "I became aware of the existence of another dimension without which I could not live as a free and courageous being; if people wanted to call it God, the term had no evil echo for me, and indeed the weight of tradition behind it seemed to me to be an argument in its favour." But nowhere in the four vols. does he confess the biblical faith: a spooky Jungianism (with a cornucopia of "Shadow" reff.) has taken its place. My own hate/love affair with Jung can be put this way: I find Freud more honest and less helpful.
4. This master stylist uses a stone (thrown by a boy of ten, found in his dead mouth at seventy) as a Satanic sacramental throughout the trilogy.
5. God is not dead, story is not dead, and the profound novel is beginning to be written once more.