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The eternal paradox of Canadian identity: Parodic intertextuality in Robertson Davies's *The Cunning Man*

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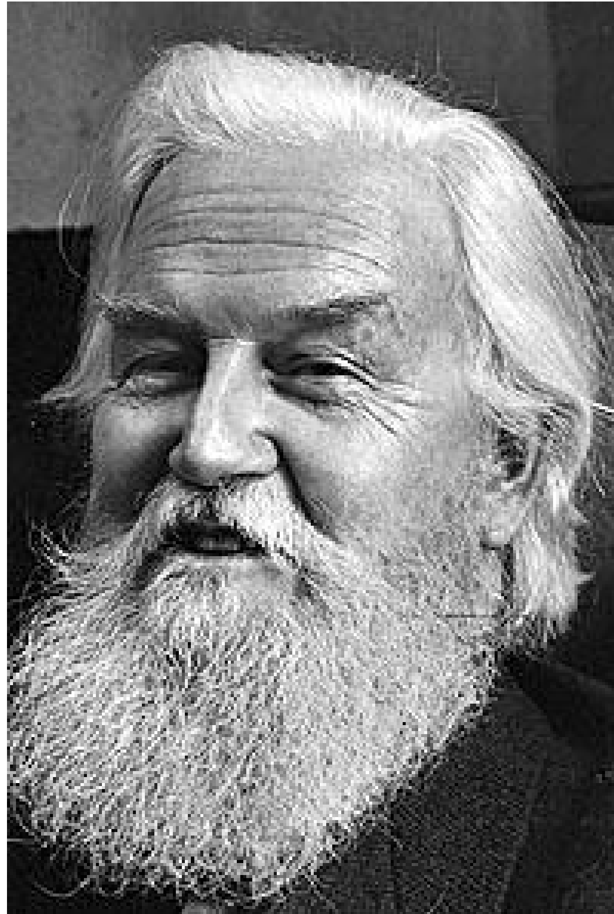

Robertson Davies (1913-1995)

TO MERVYN NOSEIGH, M.A.

Dear Mr. Noseigh,

I am enchanted by the thought that you wish to do a full-scale Ph.D. thesis on my work. Of course I recognize your name immediately as that of the writer of essays already famous in the very littlest magazines:

> *Oh Marmee, What Big Teeth You Have: A Study of the pre-Oedipal mother in the works of Louisa May Alcott—(Peewee Review:* Vol. 1, pp. 23-47*)*
>
> *Withering Depths: A Study of womb-frustration in Emily Bronte—(Wee Wisdom:* Vol. 1, pp. 22-46*)*
>
> *Codnipped: A Study of omnipotence-fantasy in the adventure novels of Robert Louis Stevenson— (Microscopic Quarterly:* Vol. 1, pp. 24-48*)*

These splendid studies are daily reading in the Marchbanks household. I cannot wait to see what you will make of me.

Tremulously yours,
Samuel Marchbanks.

(Robertson Davies, *The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks,* p. 452-453)

table of contents

Acknowledgements **5**
Chapter One: Justification for and scope of this study **6**
Chapter Two: Plot summary **9**
Chapter Three: An attempt at stabilizing intertextuality **11**
Rewriting intertextuality 12
Taking sides 23
Chapter Four: Charming narrative: metafiction in *The Cunning Man* **27**
Postmodernist narcissistic narrative 27
Self-love in *The Cunning Man* 31
Self-reflective words 32
Colliding worlds 42
Chapter Five: Intertextuality textualized: the parodic caduceus **51**
A pair of Massassauga rattlers 51
Trickster makes this world, as well as the other one 64
Chapter Six: Healing the neurotic text **93**
Psychoanalyzing Davies: a history of a writer's individuation 94
Crisis feeding obscenity: repression and parody of Jung 98
Cunningly faulty narrative: the end of parody? 104
The text in conversation 105
The madness of the text 107
An articulation towards healing 110
Chapter Seven: Conclusion **113**
Appendix **115**
Why Robertson Davies doesn't Matter, by Clint Burnham 115
Works cited **118**

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chapter one
justification for and scope of this study

We academics are always qualifying and diminishing things.
(Robertson Davies, *The Cunning Man*, p. 384)

It may very well seem that no textual study is easier than one that analyses a literary work from an intertextual perspective. As will be elaborated, the term 'intertext' indeed can be conceived very broadly. The significance of the notion can range from fictional texts to theoretical literature, from specific texts to vast cultural themes and from written texts to bodies of ideas that need no putting down. Consequently, it might appear that all texts are intertexts, and that the selection of intertexts and their arrangement into a logical argument is an obvious operation to embark upon. However, this apparent advantage may turn into a major drawback upon being confronted with an unmanageable jungle of intertexts. The overwhelming mass of intertextual references then refuses organization by the fixed academic discourse of literary criticism.

In order to counter the superficiality which the former strategy induces, the notion of intertextuality will inevitably require fencing off. In this analysis of Robertson Davies's *The Cunning Man*, the term has been narrowed down to the concept of parody as the Canadian critic and literary theorist Linda Hutcheon defines it. It is important to note that her definition of parody is embedded in a social and cultural ideology, in contrast with Fredric Jameson's view on the matter, who can only think of the postmodernist rhetorical feature as pastiche or empty parody. In this way, both the specific literary and theoretical intertexts on the one hand and the broad cultural phenomena on the other hand, which were pointed out above, are included in this study.

In this respect, this study will, wherever possible, try to seize *why* Robertson Davies makes use of the cited intertexts. Of course, it is all very nice when one can point out intertextual references and show one's learning and capacities as a source detective, but this cannot be the ultimate purpose of an intertextual dissection. Showing off one's learning – which also Davies is considered to be unable to resist – cannot be the goal of literary criticism. Thus, further steps need to be taken after determining the presence of a textual source. Therefore, this study will focus on textual strategies and on the reasons behind the reference to intertexts rather than

on the intertextual surface of *The Cunning Man.* In other words, this close investigation of Davies's novel aims at showing how form and content operate in the specific social and cultural context. It is needless to say that this is the reason why the theoretical basis of this study is Hutcheon's interpretation of parody.

The Cunning Man is Robertson Davies's last novel shortly before his death in December 1995. Critical material on *The Cunning Man* is very scant. In fact, apart from numerous reviews, only one academic essay has been published on the novel, namely Cynthia Sugars's "The Anatomy of Influence: Robertson Davies's Psychosomatic Medicine". Her article examines the intertextual relation between Davies's novel and Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. I will discuss her article and its relevance for my argument in the course of the sixth chapter of this dissertation.

The structure of this dissertation is straightforward. After the short summary of *The Cunning Man* in the second chapter, the theoretical scope of this study will be defined. The third chapter first gives a history of the theoretical concept of intertextuality, and discusses how the notion changed in the course of the twentieth century. Then, one theoretical position is chosen from which Davies's use of intertextuality in *The Cunning Man* will be analysed.

Chapters four through six read and explain the intertextual references in *The Cunning Man.* Each of these chapters reads specific intertexts from a different perspective. The fourth chapter offers a metafictional reading of *The Cunning Man*. This may seem out of place in an intertextual study, but it basically is a preparation and a basis for the next chapter, which forms the core of this dissertation. This chapter shows that the theoretical notion of intertextuality is metafictionally discussed in the novel. The sixth and final chapter is a psychoanalytic interpretation of Davies's novel. After the examination of the neurotic strategies of *The Cunning Man*, the relevance of psychoanalysis for intertextuality is made clear.

In the course of the analysis, I will try to refute some critical allegations on Robertson Davies and his work. The unfavourable criticism which Davies received is brought together articulately by the poet and critic Clint Burnham. Shortly after the death of Robertson Davies, he published an article, entitled "Why Robertson Davies Doesn't Matter" (see appendix), in which he inveighs against the status as "literary icon" which positive critics attributed to Davies, but also to Margaret Atwood, Carol Shields, Timothy Findley, and Robert Fulford. Specifically, Burnham states that Davies was politically conservative, elitist, a misogynist, and "dedicated to a foreign class system from another time (Edwardian or even Victorian England)". Moreover, he says, Davies was not concerned with the Canadian Other, namely with the lower

social classes and with black people (Burnham forgets the Indians). Also Davies's reputed intellectualist nature disgusts him. Finally, he calls his writing old-fashioned, provincial like Jane Austen's and certainly not postmodernist. In the course of this dissertation, I will try to meet these arguments and formulate a more accurate and less prejudiced appreciation of Robertson Davies and his work.

chapter two
plot summary

> The wish to be told a story never dies in the human heart, and great storytellers enjoy a long life that more subtle writers sometimes envy.
>
> (Robertson Davies, *The Merry Heart,* p. 231)

The story of *The Cunning Man* starts with a doctor who appears to be in need of false teeth. That is, Dr. Jonathan Hullah, a somewhat unconventional GP in Toronto, asks himself whether he should have taken the false teeth of Father Ninian Hobbes. The priest fell to the ground on taking the consecrated host on the morning of Good Friday, 1951, at the parish of St. Aidan's. As a former police surgeon, Hullah knows that something might be clinging to the teeth that might explain the mysterious death of the priest.

Although the death of Father Hobbes forms the catalysing event of the novel, it is soon forgotten, and Jonathan Hullah embarks upon telling the story of his life. He grew up in Sioux Lookout, Ontario, as the son of a metallurgist and a housewife. One of the key events of his youth is his illness of scarlet fever. Although the local physician, Dr. Ogg, visits him regularly, he is actually cured by Elsie Smoke, the shaman of the local Ojibwa community. Her influence is lasting, for Hullah then decides to become a doctor. Further, Hullah tells about his school-days with Charlie Iredale, who later becomes a priest at St. Aidan's, and Brocky Gilmartin, Professor of English Literature to be.

The second part of the novel relates Hullah's student years and his early experiences as a physician in the Second World War. As a student, Hullah joins one of Toronto's leading amateur theatre groups, The Players' Guild. Next to the staging of Goethe's *Faust*, the Guild undertakes nightly bacchanal escapades and participates in the hilarious Annual Bad Breath Contest. Hullah also tells of his narrow escape from death during the Blitz, when he is trapped in a bathtub for four days in a hotel in London.

The third episode introduces the Ladies. The Ladies are Emily Ravenhart and Chips, Hullah's landladies at Glebe House, Toronto. Hullah develops his medical practice and his curious diagnostic techniques, and brings them to perfection. Father Hobbes's death is recounted, but now from the point of view of Chips. The

Archdeacon banishes Charlie to the provincial North of Ontario and burdens him with the stupefying task of seeing after various parishes.

The last part of the novel starts with Hullah's realisation that he is getting old. He plans to become immortal by writing a medical anatomy of the illnesses of the notable characters of fiction. He calls his life work *The Anatomy of Fiction.* The plot of the last part of *The Cunning Man* is continually interrupted by Hullah's notes for his *Anatomy.* Charlie returns from his squalid existence in the North, suffering dreadfully from alcoholism. Finally, the murder mystery is resolved: on his deathbed, Charlie confesses to having murdered Father Hobbes in front of the altar in church by poisoning the host. He explains that he was driven to this deed by a supernatural voice in his dreams, which ordered him to turn Hobbes into a saint. The story ends with Hullah assessing his life, and with Davies's self-prophetic words:

> This is the Great Theatre of Life. Admission is free but the taxation is mortal. You come when you can, and leave when you must. The show is continuous. Good-night.
>
> (CM 469)

chapter three
an attempt at stabilizing intertextuality

> History is never dead, because it keeps on repeating itself, though never in quite the same words or on quite the same scale. […] The wax of human experience is always the same. It is we who put our stamp on it.
>
> (Robertson Davies, *The Lyre Of Orpheus*, p. 883)

The critic Harold Bloom once remarked that the concept of intertextuality is at the same time "underdetermined in meaning and overdetermined in figuration" (Allen 2000:2). The vagueness of the notion, resulting in rife and often promiscuous use of the term, indeed poses a pressing problem for any intertextual study. In order to extract from and select out of a literary text the relevant explicit and implicit intertexts, we will first have to define the scope of the notion 'intertext'. As we will experience, such a definition will invariably equal a limitation of the theoretical concept of intertextuality. Only on the basis of a delineation of the idea, we can choose the appropriate categories we will apply to the intertextual field in which the literary text nestles.

And yet, even defining a theoretical basis for an intertextual analysis does not prove to be as straightforward as taken at face value. As Jonathan Culler puts it:

> Theories of intertextuality set before us perspectives of unmasterable series, lost origins, endless horizons; and, as I have been suggesting, in order to work with the concept we focus it—but that focusing may always, to some degree, undermine the general concept of intertextuality in whose name we are working.
>
> (1983:111)

Putting down a definition of intertextuality does not only limit the concept and yield an unproductive way of reading texts; the very nature of intertextuality even resists pinning down. As we will see, the concept of intertextuality refuses a stable logical construct because of its own dependence on an intertextuality which is not firmly defined. In order to explain this paradox, we will first have to look at the attempts at setting down an outline of the notion. For the history of intertextual theory, I will primarily draw upon Graham Allen's *Intertextuality.*

REWRITING INTERTEXTUALITY

The use of intertextuality is not reserved for postmodern writers exclusively. Over the centuries, authors have shown to read and rewrite each others' works. The foetal form of literary criticism and theory has since the very beginning of literature been aware of this practice. Michael Worton and Judith Still track the theoretical discussion of the term back to the Greeks (1990:2-8). For easy reference, and because the concept has only in the past century gained the accurate attention it rightfully deserves, I will not follow this strand, but I will rather focus on the period in which the term was for the first time specifically articulated.

What is more, the theoretical construct of intertextuality was not even invented by literary theorists. In fact, current intertextual theory stems, to put it really bluntly, from the linguistic field. I write *bluntly*, because the science of linguistics, which dominated Western thought after the Second World War, was never itself concerned with the definition of intertextuality. Its theories, however, gained merit for redefining our general notions about language, the influence of which covered the whole of Western thought, including literary theory. The first theoretical outline of intertextuality, then, originated in a host of reactions of a European think tank that positioned itself against the structuralist theories of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure.

The basic dichotomy posited by Saussurean linguistics is inherent in any sign of language, namely the distinction between *signifier* and *signified*. The latter is the concept or the meaning; the former is the material trace (sound or letter) which images the meaning. In terming the linguistic sign as such, Saussure reviewed language as an instrument which does not directly refer to reality, but which is a self-contained system of signs, because it points to a significance that is contained within its own, i.e. the signified. Saussure thus radically pushed over our belief in language as an organic part of society, and redefined its status as an object that existed within society and of which the latter made use, rather than a mirror that coincided with it. In the literary system, as Graham Allen points out, the sign system's self-reference is exploited to the fullest, "since in reading literature we become intensely aware that the signs deployed in any particular text have their reference not to objects in the world but to the literary system out of which the text is produced" (2000:11).

One of the characteristics of the sign is its differentiality. The linguistic token is differential because it only derives meaning because of its relation with and opposition to other linguistic signs. A word thus bears significance because it

nestles in a network of words, which is unlimited and ever-changing. This relates to the idea of the text as a piece of woven cloth, i.e. as a configuration of different threads. With respect to the web of the text, though Saussure did not openly recognize this, the meaning of the sign is not stable: it shifts as the configuration of which it forms part mutates. "[Signs] only possess what meaning they do possess because of their combinatory and associative relation to other signs" (Allen 2000:10). The notion of the differentiality of language is the grain of mustard for intertextual theory.

The other Saussurean dichotomy that was significant for the initial impulse of intertextual theory is the opposition *langue* versus *parole*. The former refers to the synchronic and generalized system of a language, while the latter refers to the actual use of the system by the speakers of that language. All possible sentences of a language can be formed through knowledge of the system. As the *parole* is only an actualised derivative of the abstract system, the science of linguistics, according to Saussure, must constrain itself to the *langue*, rather than the *parole*. It is precisely this which is the Achilles heel of structuralist linguistics. In foisting primacy upon the *langue*, Saussure let himself in for much critical attention. One of these reactions was pronounced by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who will be of massive importance as the second building stone of the initial theoretical concept of intertextuality.

Bakhtin introduced into the theory of language the element of the speaker. With the speaker, he drags along his whole social context, in order to counter Saussure's rigid insistence upon the system of the *langue*. Bakhtin marks the shift from system to person, i.e. from the systematized sentence to what he calls the *utterance.* As opposed to the abstract sentential structure of structuralism, the utterance is shot through with social relations. The word, next to seeking its kin within the Saussurean differential network of language, is situated in a social web. Bakhtin, then, does not completely do away with the differential nature of the sign that structuralism lays bare. He rather translates and extends it to the social. As post-Saussurean theorists hold responsible the differential nature of the sign for its instability, so does Bakhtin ascribe the variability of language to its social character.

> Language is always in a 'ceaseless flow of becoming'. Language, seen in its social dimension, is constantly reflecting and transforming class, institutional, national and group interests. No word or utterance, from this perspective, is ever neutral. Though the meaning of utterances may be unique, they still derive from already established patterns of meaning recognizable by the addressee and adapted by the addresser. But these established patterns are not the abstract ones of Saussure's *langue*, they are

> rather the manner in which language embodies and reflects constantly changing social values and positions.
>
> (Allen 2000:18)

In connection with this, he terms *addressivity* as one of the key concepts to clarify his linguistic perspective. A word does not merely live within the system: it is addressed to a recipient. Its meaning, then, arises from the space between two speakers. This idea has been taken up again in the later strand of psychoanalytical literary criticism. In the reaction of the addressee to the addresser does significance take shape, and then still, it is not decisive, as it can again be reviewed and further processed. Thus, no statement in itself contains final significance.

As no text can claim definitive meaning, all texts are equal. There is no supreme interpretation that dominates other ones, which entails that there is no authorial point of reference whatsoever. This understanding of texts is representative of the postmodern vision on language. Jean Baudrillard speaks of postmodernism as "the age of simulation [which] begins with a liquidation of all referentials" (1983:167). For some critics this idea would kill off the author. For Bakhtin, however, the lack of an authorial spot of orientation does not mean that the writer does not have a finger in the textual pie. He is just not a god-like mastermind that creates his texts out of nothing. The writer is more of a re-writer, recycling bits of texts and insights into a new coherent narrative. He still controls the making of the text to a certain extent.

The subsuming Bakhtinian term for the mutability of language is *dialogism.* Language, for Bakhtin, is inherently dialogic, because it is an intensely social construct which is subjected to criticism and rephrasing. However, not every text – I use the word in the broadest sense possible – displays its dialogism to the same extent. Dialogism can either be promoted or repressed. The latter strategy is at work in texts which try to reduce themselves to their own logic, in an attempt to glue together the signifier and the signified. But, as all language is by definition dialogic, this practice, which *tends* to lead to monologism, is doomed to failure. Even scientific texts, which claim to be of a monological and stable nature, are dialogical. On the other hand, texts that encourage dialogism are consequently the ones that use the full potential of language.

This has been confirmed by theories on language and literature. These divide language, by analogy with the classical study of the trivium (dialectics, grammar and rhetoric), into three pillars. Firstly, language deals with the communication of meaning. It ties a concept or signified to a material trace or a signifier. This constituent may be called semiotics, logic or dialectics. Secondly, it needs a toolkit

to communicate this logic, which is the grammar. If these two things alone constituted language, its mechanism could be equated with that of other sign systems, such as mathematics. What mathematics does is convey a logical construct by means of a set of rules which we call arithmetic operators. Language, however, is completely different from this singular kind of code system, as its logic is disturbed by a third component, namely rhetoric. Speech is not only determined by logic and grammar: "Language can be made to bear more than what a grammar assigns. If rhetoric is the rule of that supplementation, poetics is perhaps the rule or principle of repletion" (Graham 1992:179). Generally, the rhetorical component is kept down in everyday language. Rhetoric functions as "the crucial difference in aesthetics – the special force of the literary – already at work in ordinary language" (Graham 1992:180). Literature, then, differs from everyday language in that it exploits the rhetorical capability of language. "If literature is to tell us what we want to know most about ourselves, it should rather speak in the terms of rhetoric" (Graham 1992:198). This is what makes literature so difficult a read. Rhetoric, which precisely makes literary works into objects of beauty, disperses logic. As Oscar Wilde phrased it, "a mist makes things wonderful" (1992:162).

It should be taken into account that Bakhtin's dialogism does not merely refer to the reciprocity of speech and to the exchange of world-view between two speakers of a language, or two characters in a novel, but also to the inner conflict within one character. This is what Bakhtin calls *double-voiced discourse*. Here, two voices collide within one character. Other than that, dialogism is also involved at the level of the word. Language is *heteroglot*: it is the carrier of several voices. In Graham Allen's words: "The word becomes one's own through an act of 'appropriation', which means that it is never wholly one's own, is always permeated with traces of other words, other uses" (2000:28). This comes in fact pretty close to the differentiality of the sign which Saussure distinguished. The word, as a sign, is dependent upon other words, and in addition its meaning varies as to its place in the system.

The very term 'intertextuality' was first coined by Julia Kristeva, and came about through a rereading and a consequent rewriting of Bakhtinian linguistic philosophy from the perspective of poststructuralism. She remains faithful to Bakthin's thesis that texts are not to be unleashed from their social and cultural context and tradition. Texts are the instances of social struggle and are inscribed in a cultural history out of which the writer draws his ideas. Graham Allen reads Kristeva as someone who is "concerned with establishing the manner in which a text is constructed out of already existent discourse" (2000:35). She elaborates on

the social and cultural-historical situatedness of texts by pointing out that Bakhtin failed to distinguish a doubleness in the mechanism of texts. According to Kristeva, the text functions in two dimensions. The horizontal, Bakhtinian axis of the text points to the communication between addresser and addressee; the vertical axis shows the text's inheritance of prior or current texts. In acknowledging the text's two-dimensionality, Kristeva arrives at the term 'intertextuality'.

Kristeva also opposes Saussurean structuralism on the same grounds on which Bakhtin refused it, namely that in stressing the study of the system, it tries to weld together signifier and signified, and to cancel out all superfluous meaning which a text produces. Kristeva, who instantiates "a critique of communication" (Allen 2000:33), as Barthes puts it, radically refuses any such reasoning, which is based on Aristotelian philosophy. The latter strand of reasoning believes that reality can be logically deduced and cut up into binary oppositions. Aristotle forces one to choose between 1 and 0 (Allen 2000:43-44), and leaves no breathing space for what Kristeva, as a devoted deconstructionist, calls *productivity*: "so many ongoing transformations and/or productions" (Allen 2000:34). The mutability of literary production fundamentally clashes with the (supposed) stability of logical consumption. Kristeva indeed uses a Marxist perspective to counter the discourse of logic, and, by extension, the logic of discourse. Poststructuralism, as it was laid out by Jacques Derrida as both a continuation and a criticism of structuralism, thoroughly denies a coherent and therefore consumable understanding, as the linguistic sign is not stable, but erratic. For Derrida, "writing is the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language and places it for ever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge." (Norris 1982:28). The material letter may be digital, which is why we can set apart a minimal pair such as 'rat' and 'cat', but meaning and reality are inherently analogue. Postmodern epistemology debunks any such firm position of meaning: knowledge shifts continually. Literature, then, as the intense exploitation of the rhetorical potential of language, 'scandalously' exposes itself as not falling into Aristotelian categories, as it overtly produces excess which cannot be grasped in a stable logical construct. Kristeva's dichotomy of consumable versus productive texts mirrors Bakhtin's opposition between monologic and dialogic texts. Or at least, it mirrors the apparent opposition, for in fact, the question of where to draw the line is not easy to answer. There may not even be a division. Kristeva confirms Bakhtin's suggestion that all language is dialogical, including the supposed unwavering language of logic. The Bakhtinian repressive practice of the so-called monologic texts also does not succeed in her perspective:

> Literature cannot be the privileged site of this radical mode of semiotic production. […] Kristeva, in this new semiotics, constantly places scientific and logical discourses within artistic and fictional contexts, thus self-consciously blurring the distinction and staging the struggle between science, or the logical, and the language or force of imagination and desire.
> (Allen 2000:34-35)

Thus Kristeva largely translates Bakhtinian notions into her narrative, combining them with a fresh critique on structuralism. What distinguishes her from Bakhtin, however, is a return to the text. Whereas Bakhtin primarily stressed the interaction of the text with its social context, she restores the focus on the text. The interpersonal nature of language which Bakhtin exposed becomes with Kristeva the *intertextual* nature of language: "the notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity" (Allen 2000:39). The *utterance* is redefined as the *enunciation*. The former term does not cut loose its ties with its originator, i.e. the human speaker, while the latter does, namely in concentrating on the form of the word. She backs this by stating that in writing, the subject is lost. The utterance occurs in the socially communicative situation; the enunciation appears in the narrative act. In this narrative context, the human speaker disappears: it is the text that speaks. The text obscures the subject by assuming its speaking position.

The original subject is not only lost in writing, it is also responsible for the intertextual nature of writing (Allen 2000:48-52). Inspired by Lacanian psychoanalysis, Kristeva posits a radical chasm in the subject: it is torn between the symbolic and the semiotic order. It is important not to confuse the order of these two terms. We might be tempted to hook up the semiotic to the kind of rigid connection between the signifier and signified which Saussure distinguishes in his semiotics, and to associate the symbolic with a more open relation. On the contrary, for Lacan, the symbolic represents the male aspect, governed by logic and prohibition. The semiotic, on the other hand, is fed by the maternal breast and gives in to desire. In the pre-symbolic order, there is no real difference between the child and its surroundings. The subject and its context flow into each other. It is only in symbolic discourse that the subject is fixed.

The same holds true for the text. Narratives are likewise split between the symbolic and the semiotic. The text is essentially a semiotic drive which is to a large or a small degree fixed into a symbolic structure. Neither of the two poles can claim complete supremacy over the text. The semiotic cannot go without the symbolic and vice versa. Kristeva terms texts that yearn towards the symbolic *phenotexts*. The latter cover the scientific kind. The literary text, which maximizes the semiotic component, is called the *genotext*. It is not in the least surprising that

Kristeva, in naming the latter as such, cannot repress a reference to the process of genesis. The term genotext relates to Kristeva's postulation that language is always in a state of production, rather than finished or produced.

This leads us to the conclusion that the dichotomy between the semiotic and the symbolic mirrors Kristeva's division between productive and consumable texts. The former classification refers to the cause, while the latter indicates the effect. Bakhtin's monologic text is ruled by the symbolic and strives towards the consumable, while the dialogic text is nourished by the semiotic and results in productivity. Kristeva then applies this textual psychoanalytical model of desire to the theory of intertextuality, in which she shows that the split nature of the subject accounts for the existence of the intertextual practice. Both writer and reader, as torn human beings, are to a large or small extent directed towards the semiotic, and in this way disrupt the text they are writing or reading. The subject, under the influence of its semiotic drive, unravels the threads of narrative by pulling the stable symbolic nature of the text towards the semiotic. Kristeva names this process *transposition*. She prefers this term over *intertextuality*, so as not to relapse into the traditional intertextual study of source and influence.

One of the temptations intertextuality easily succumbs to is the annihilation of any kind of authority. It has been made clear by Bakhtin and Kristeva that every word, and by extension every text, is inscribed within a tradition of which the ultimate origin cannot be traced. A text, as a signifier, can merely express its affiliation with another text, which in its turn mirrors yet another text. The reader of texts thus remains only with signifiers. The referral from one signifier to another again and again delays the resolution of the text with an original signified. Meaning is always deferred, or in Allen's words "over the horizon" (2000:74). In this point of view, there is no meaning, and every design of a Grand Originator is crossed out. By analogy, the idea of the author as one who is able to present a coherent text with unitary meaning dwindles. The postmodern writer, and indeed any writer at all, cannot consolidate signifier and signified. This is what Roland Barthes terms, after Nietzsche's "death of God", "the death of the Author". With Barthes, the Author is reduced to a modern scriptor, who gathers bits of text and reassembles them into a narrative, the meaning of which he cannot fully control. Instead of the unitary text, there is the *déjà*: the already written, spoken, and read. Barthes's death of the Author is inserted in a Marxist discourse. Through the connection of a text to an authorial name, the publisher secures the consumption of literature. In presenting as the origin of the literary work a non-questionable Author, who holds together signifier and signified, he renders the work, in Kristeva's words,

consumable. This creates on the part of the reader the illusion that he can read exhaustively, which makes literary works disposable. Consequently, this guarantees the sale of other and new books.

Other than that, also Barthes rewrites the oppositions his predecessors lay bare. In the wake of Bakhtin and Kristeva he pits *readerly* against *writerly* texts. He identifies the readerly kind mainly with the classical realist novel and with the detective genre. These genres presuppose a direct link between text and reality in which language plays a depictive or representational rather than a creative role. In this account, language serves the quest for absolute truth. Writerly texts, by contrast, deny any such coherent understanding, and employ language as a means to create one possible and fluctuating version of reality instead of an unquestionable representative narrative. In the tracks of Derrida, Barthes's writerly text "explodes and disperses" (Allen 2000:77) instead of closing the gap between text and world. The genuinely intertextual is, according to Barthes, responsible for the dissemination of meaning in writerly texts. However, remembering both Bakhtin's and Kristeva's axiom that the merely dialogic respectively semiotic text is a fiction, the purely writerly text is a utopia. The writerly expresses itself through the readerly, as much as the readerly text carries a certain amount of writerly drive. Neither of the poles can cancel out the other.

Bakhtin, Kristeva and Barthes, as the three founders of the poststructuralist theory of intertextuality, share a cultivation of the plural nature of texts. This plurality is for all of them the result of the intertextual force which is at work in all writing and speech. This drive is either foregrounded or repressed. What they also have in common is an opposition against the structuralist line of thinking which was instituted by Saussure, though they cannot deny that their theories are indebted to the notion of the differentiality of the sign which structuralism exposed.

However, there is also a structuralist wave in literary criticism and theory. Graham Allen discusses two protagonists of structuralist analysis: Gérard Genette and Michel Rifaterre. Both of them contest the openness of the intertextual model which poststructuralism celebrates (Allen 2000:95-97). Instead, they believe that a literary work comes into being through rearrangement of the relations of a closed literary system (*langue*). The author extracts from the literary *langue* a set of rules which he deems salient for his work and obscures them in a literary *parole* or work. The task of the critic, then, is to uncover the processes which the author made use of, and to translate the literary text back to the language of the literary system in which it originated. Structuralist criticism thus has faith in the stabilization of the

text into a coherent whole, which is unitary, in contrast to the plural character that poststructuralists ascribe to the text.

In the application of the radically different kinds of critical analysis, i.e. structuralism and poststructuralism, to a literary text, we experience that structuralism fixes the text too rigidly so that it becomes devitalised, which is why I will not go into a detailed description of structuralist intertextual study. On the other hand, the poststructuralist approach fails to come up with any kind of methodology, which leaves the reader alone with a text which is too big to handle in its entirety, as it disperses meaning infinitely in the direction of the intertextual. This openness indeed brings us back to the vagueness of the notion with which I set off in this discussion. The resolution, or rather the compromise between structuralist formalism and poststructuralist radicalism can be found in the intertextual argument as formulated by Linda Hutcheon.

The Canadian postmodernist critic Hutcheon ties in with the poststructuralist tradition of locating the literary work, as a collage of signs, in a network. In quoting Sherrie Levine, she clearly reveals that she inscribes to the view that words and larger linguistic entities have been used many times before us, and that by consequence we cannot claim unique ownership over them.

> Every word, every image is *leased and mortgaged*. We know that a picture is but a space in which a variety of images, none of them original, blend and clash. A picture is *a tissue of quotations* drawn from the innumerable centers of culture.
>
> (quoted in Hutcheon 1989:94, my italics)

What is more, the net in which signs are embedded is historical. In saying so, she radically questions models which view postmodern intertextuality as dehistoricized, empty, value-free and a-critical. The major postmodernist theorist Fredric Jameson argues that, from a postmodernist plural point of view, a text has neither unique meaning nor form. As all is equal and one, there is nothing that can be submitted to a critical gaze, for the latter practice requires an object which offers exclusive meaning or form. Therefore, in Jameson's opinion, postmodernist rewriting is free of values. This kind of literary relativism results in pastiche, or empty parody. Hutcheon fundamentally runs counter to this – nonetheless greatly supported – valueless perspective on postmodernity. In contrast with Jameson's pastiche, she terms the postmodern use of intertextuality *parody*, which "signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference" (Hutcheon 1989:89). The

application of parody to former texts is installed in a context which is not ideologically indifferent. It is historical, critical and relates to the current status quo; to the way we, as postmodern subjects, view ourselves and our society. Hutcheon in this way reinterprets Bakthin's social situatedness of the text, and broadens it to the historical. Today's big read is *historiographic* metafiction: it cannot rebuff its bonds with the past.

Parody implies more than historical situatedness, though. Its ideological awareness paves the way for criticism. It is not because historiographic metafiction uses past forms of representation that it has to agree with these. Parody is thoroughly critical and works both ways: it is double-coded in that it both incorporates past forms of writing and subverts them. It uses in order to abuse. The same might be said to hold true for modernist writing, however. Yet, Hutcheon is cunning to seal up loopholes in her argument on parody. Modernist texts indeed also apply the parodical practice in a double direction. Even so, what makes them so different from postmodernist writing is that in the end, they present the parodic form as transparent, whereas the postmodernist text drastically turns down any such intelligibility. This again has to do with the distinct ideological backgrounds out of which both movements emerge. Modernism still fosters a belief in art as a stable means to depict a possible version of reality. The postmodern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, in claiming the end of all metanarratives, goes further and removes also literature from its pedestal as a grand story. Postmodernism "rejects the resolving urge of modernism toward closure or at least distance" (Hutcheon 1989:95). The modernist parodic double in the end reaches hands, while postmodernism openly and self-consciously refuses to do so. In the current parodic battlefield, "the doubleness of the politics of authorized transgression remains intact: there is no dialectic resolution or recuperative evasion of contradictions in narrative fiction" (Hutcheon 1989:102). Significantly, Kristeva complies with this in her reading of Bakhtin. As she is always attentive to discourses that are victimised by monologism, she points out that Hegelian dialectics rule out any kind of doubleness. Hegel's philosophy reconciles thesis with antitheses, and moreover, moves them to a higher unitary level. Kristeva interprets Hegel's synthetic echelon as his genuflection to monologism (Allen 2000:45-47).

We have seen that with Bakhtin, the social drive is responsible for the splitting up of dialogic and monologic texts. The same holds true for Kristeva: the dissimilar uses of intertextuality separate consumable and productive texts. The more intertextual energy is put into a text, the more literary, unstable and therefore the more productive it becomes. Texts which put the lid on the intertextual dispersive

steamer are the most logical and consumable ones. Yet, both types of writing make use of the same basic components – with Kristeva the symbolic and the semiotic – and only the composition of the blend accounts for the difference between scientific and literary texts. Hutcheon's theories about intertextuality equally mirror those of her precursors in the division that arises out of the distinct applications of parody. The more parodical spirit is put into a text, the more fictional it becomes; the more it is repressed, the more factual it may become. This is not to say that parody is the only rhetorical feature that disperses meaning and makes texts literary. But also here, dialogic and monologic, productive and consumable or fictional and factual differ only in the application of the parodic thrust. The latter is confirmed by Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction. Fact and fiction, or in her dichotomy, history and literature are intimately connected.

> Recent critical readings of both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of writing share than on how they differ. They have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalised in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality.
> (Hutcheon 1988a:105)

In this context, literary texts overtly recognize their indebtedness to their ancestors through use and abuse, while historical texts try to submerge them in the factual flood.

From a literary critical point of view, parody is an important theoretical notion, because it comes up with solutions to a few discomforts which intertextuality may cause when applied to texts. First and foremost, the term is of a literary nature. The entry for parody in the OED says:

> A composition in prose or verse in which the characteristic turns of thought and phrase in an author or class of authors are imitated in such a way as to make them appear ridiculous, especially by applying them to ludicrously inappropriate subjects; an imitation of a work more or less closely modelled on the original, but so turned as to produce a ridiculous effect.

Contrary to the terms dialogism and intertextuality as formulated by Bakhtin and Kristeva respectively, parody points to a specificity of literature. It transforms the content and/or form of a specific work, a specific author, or a specific group of authors. Hutcheon's term is important because it tracks intertextuality back to one specific work or body of works, rather than losing its way in what many theorists

experience as an infinite regress. Next to that, it also counters the idea of a text just sitting at the crossroads of Bakhtin's and Kristeva's vague mass of social and cultural discourse. Also Barthes speaks of a certain *ennui*, because the literary text can only refer to the *déjà* (Allen 2000:89). Even the structuralist Rifaterre lapses into this kind of reading of the intertextual in defining the intertext as a part of the sociolect.

> We do not, that is, need to discover specific inter-texts behind the texts we read; all we need to do to produce a sufficient interpretation is to assume that such an inter-text – either a specific text or a piece of socially significant language – is being transformed by the text in question.
>
> (Allen 2000:121)

Criticism on Rifaterre rests precisely on this supposedly common and presupposed sociolect. Instead, each culture has its own specific sociolect. Hutcheon's parodic text does away with all this boring vagueness by commenting critically on one specific text or body of texts. Thus, it offers refreshing thoughts about the literary predecessor.

TAKING SIDES

We have to return to our initial paradox of intertextuality. A history of the rewriting of the concept of intertextuality makes clear two things. First, it is intertextual, for major theorists of the idea seem to mirror each other. Secondly, it uncovers the overwhelming truth that the idea is too broad to work with. In an attempt to come to terms with this, we either limit the scope of our study or enlarge it. The former strategy, which is represented by structuralism, often results in a focus which is too narrow, and will make us feel that we miss something. The opposite and poststructuralist scenario equally undermines the concept of intertextuality. That is, in widening the scope, we are methodologically unsatisfied and moreover, we experience that all text is intertext, and that consequently the whole idea of intertextuality loses its significance because of its very own tautology. Something of the latter is true, though. The underlying reason for our not being able to decide on either of the two strategies to tackle intertextuality is the very fact that the writing of the idea of intertextuality is itself intertextual. Graham Allen concludes his elaborate study of the concept with the same feeling.

> A term which continually refers to the impossibility of singularity, unity, and thus of unquestionable authority, intertextuality remains a potent tool within any reader's theoretical vocabulary. By that same logic, however, it also remains a tool which cannot be employed by readers wishing to produce stability and order, or wishing to claim authority over the text or other critics. This is perhaps the reason, since cultural debate never ceases, that intertextuality promises to be as vital and productive a concept in the future as it has been in the recent past.
>
> (2000:209)

The paradox with which we set off is not to be put aside. Intertextuality indeed refuses a stable logical construct because it is dependent on an intertextuality which is not firmly defined. All writing is intertextual, so that the borderline between fiction and fact does not reside in the egotistical claiming of the intertextual practice by literature. The concept of intertextuality, and literary criticism in general, are as delusive as literature itself. In the words of Paul de Man: "Literature as well as criticism – the difference between them being delusive – is condemned (or privileged) to be forever the most rigorous and, consequently, the most unreliable language in terms of which man names and transforms himself" (quoted in Norris 1982:xi). Thus, after Kristeva, "literature cannot be the privileged site of this radical mode of semiotic production" (Allen 2000:34). Bakhtin, Barthes and Hutcheon corroborate this in their own reading of the notion. Consequently, if intertextuality as a concept is itself intertextual, it is a cause of striking the happy medium between the monologic, consumable, stabilizing and usable approach on the one hand and the dialogic, productive, dispersive and 'ab-usable' strategy on the other hand.

So, we realize that we need to assume a position, but it is of utter importance that in doing so, we must acknowledge that this position will not provide us with ultimate peace and quiet. The intertextual conundrum is just not a matter of having your cake and eating it too. From a deconstructionist point of view, this understanding must express itself in an openness of the model. We must not constrain, we must focus. The blinds of constraint are opaque; those of focus are transparent.

For the definition of our scope, we can assume various positions. Intertextuality can be applied to the social, the historical, the psychological, the philosophical, etc. A literary intertextual study, then, should focus on the question of what it precisely is that constitutes literature, i.e. which bit it is that makes literature different from other domains of speech and thought. The trivium of language provides us with an answer. The rhetorical constituent of language is present in all modes of writing. However, the specific application of it accounts for the differences in these modes.

The sort of narrative which self-consciously cultivates this rhetoric will then be what we call literature. A literary critical study focuses on this rhetoric. One of the "most pervasive and powerful devices of rhetorical language" (Norris 1982:100) is metaphor. It "has come to be regarded as the hallmark of 'creative' language, the means by which it breaks with the normal run of day-to-day 'literal' usage" (Norris 1982:101). Another aspect of the rhetorical dispersion of literature is the intertextual drive, which is our concern.

An intertextual critical study of *The Cunning Man* imposes on the analyst a few requirements. First and foremost, the study of a postmodernist novel obviously asks for an equal postmodernist critical analysis. The postmodernist text must be analysed by means of its contemporary criticism, as both are inscribed in the same specific ideology.

For reasons which should by now already be clear, we will not follow the structuralist strand. Genette's main axiom has it that the writer translates the literary system (*langue*) into the literary work (*parole*), and that the critic's task is to extract out of the text the coherent literary system again. Davies radically opposes any such reasoning. In an interview, he says:

> You see, people like academics, are possessed with the notion that you've got some scheme that you wish to put forward or some philosophy you wish to impose on the world, and that you start off with that, and then you hang stories on it as you might hang clothes on a model. That's not so, that's ridiculous! If there's any life in the work, it is because you write about people and about situations and about things that really interest you, not to exemplify an idea.
>
> (Swaim 1989, 14'27-15'00)

What is more, Genette's theory ignores the outside of the text. He seems to forget that the content and the form of the text are responses to the dominant status quo, and that both the textual inside and the ideological outside are not to be cut loose. Rifaterre comes up with a criticism against this and understands the need for the outside perhaps a bit too well, as he posits the existence of a common presupposition. Also this belief is ineffective, as it does not take notice of the specificity of different ideologies, both historical and cultural. Graham Allen cleverly remarks that readers "clearly do not share a single 'sociolect' " (2000:132).

Further, we will not side with Barthes's idea of the death of the Author. As will be investigated in detail in chapter five, *The Cunning Man* and the idea of parody necessitate the structuring presence of the writer.

Bakhtin, as the founder of twentieth century intertextual theory, is not specific enough to proffer a literary critical manual to analyse texts. He puts too much weight on the social and consequently is not attentive to the inside of the text.

Kristeva asserts to do otherwise, in reclaiming the focus on the text. Sadly, this project goes off and she is, according to the critic John Frow, guilty of "los[ing] sight of the precise manner in which a literary text relates to social ideological structures: that is, by transforming the ideologically significant norms of the literary canon" (Allen 2000:56). She confirms the importance of both ideology and the text, but is unable to offer the link between them. What authors do, according to Frow, is transform "the available literary genres and dominant formal practices" (Allen 2000:57) as they are inscribed in their ideological surrounding. Kristeva describes the literary in terms of a non-textual theoretical discourse: "the point of reference (the material which is to be transformed) lies outside the literary system" (Allen 2000:57). Intertextuality is thus with Kristeva, just as with Bakhtin, a broad cultural phenomenon, rather than a specific literary response to the social state of affairs.

Hutcheon's parodical theory, conversely, seems to encompass all of these problems and requirements. Her notion takes into consideration both the outside and the inside of the text and the relation between them. It nestles in the cultural and social in questioning dominant (past) literary norms, and in showing that these norms were anchored in the then dominant ideology. Postmodernist parody uses and abuses self-consciously, and is intensely aware of the impossibility of resolution by means of this practice. This irresolution relates to today's dominant discourse, i.e. to the philosophical paradigm which denies the transparency of the literary sign because of which, after Derrida, meaning disperses and goes off in all directions. Intertextuality is from this point of view never the messenger of stable logical significance. Or, in Paul de Man's phrasing, it offers a resistance to theory.

Next to this ideological kinship, parody points to a literary technique, namely the reordering of bits of text into another narrative. This rearrangement works both from the sources of form and content. Specific modes of writing are parodied, which practice is, in Hutcheon's theory, always double: past conventions are both incorporated and subverted. The particular character of Hutcheon's parodical theory will prove of massive importance for Robertson Davies's *The Cunning Man*. The fifth chapter will form an attempt to scrutinize the relation between Hutcheon's parody and its thematic and strategic application in the novel under discussion.

chapter four

charming narrative: metafiction in *the cunning man*

Never neglect the charms of narrative for the human heart.
(Robertson Davies, *The Cunning Man,* p. 75)

The previous chapter has revealed that the borderline between fact and fiction is pretty permeable. Literary theorists and philosophers have proven that both factual and fictional texts basically use the same building stones – only in a different way – to construct dissimilar narratives. In all writing a plural force is at work. Bakthin, Kristeva and Hutcheon respectively call this plurality dialogism, intertextuality and parody. Texts which assert to present fact tone down this dispersion; texts which promote the latter are attributed the most literary character.

This chapter will attempt to further break down the division between fact and fiction by fleshing out the self-consciousness of the text of *The Cunning Man*. The discussion sets off with a brief theoretical survey of some postmodernist metafictional queries that are important for the analysis of *The Cunning Man*. Then, the novel will be investigated from the perspective of this metafictional theory.

POSTMODERNIST NARCISSISTIC NARRATIVE

Love, it appears, makes fiction go round; or at least it circulates everywhere *in* fiction.
(Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction,* p. 222)

The possibility of looking for the kind of reading which connects literature with its theory is opened up by the fact that *The Cunning Man* is, as a postmodernist novel, to a large extent self-reflexive and concerned with metafiction. Linda Hutcheon, in search of the core of today's fiction, says that "since all fiction is a kind of parody of life, no matter how verisimilar it pretends to be, the most authentic and honest fiction might well be that which most freely acknowledges its fictionality" (1980:49). In the past, fiction tried to close the gap between art and reality and to identify the cover of the book with the verges of our world. The latter practice culminated in the classical realist tradition of the nineteenth century. For classic

realism, there is no fiction, but only reality and linguistic or textual traces which depict this reality.

Since fiction has grown into maturity, however, it has radically questioned the relationship between world and text that was considered so natural before. In contrast with its ancestry, the Big Read of the postmodernist strain openly stresses its status as an artefact. As has already been pointed out in the previous chapter, the science of linguistics and its philosophy kindled the reviewing and indeed turning over of our belief in the descriptive quality of language in the twentieth century. Attention was drawn to the self-containedness of the linguistic sign.

> The simple notion that language passively reflects a coherent, meaningful and 'objective' world is no longer tenable. Language is an independent, self-contained system which generates its own 'meanings'. Its relationship to the phenomenal world is highly complex, problematic and regulated by convention.
>
> (Waugh 1984:3)

Language is not reality; it can merely offer a distorted attempt at grasping reality. It constitutes its own "realities", the sum of which does not even come close to Reality. Or, as Davies puts it: "All formulas for meeting life -- even many philosophies -- are illusion" (Kuchling 2002:13). The fact that the linguistic unit asserted its existence as something separate from reality as a whole, rather than its coincidence with it, had its implications for the postmodernist novel as well. For the postmodernist text, there is no longer an organic bond between the world and the linguistic work of art. Moreover, the postmodern abyss between language and reality is a gaping wound. Postmodernist writing scandalously flaunts its epistemological insecurities, namely its failure to claim absolute knowledge over the world and to trace over reality in the text. One of the ways of foregrounding the fictionality of fiction is by employing *meta*fiction: fiction which writes *on* fiction, or, as Patricia Waugh puts it, fiction which "explore[s] a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction" (1984:2). The postmodernist text, aware of its contemporary ontology, questions its own existence as a work of art and does this by inserting these queries in the text on a metafictional level. Out of this, a blend of fact and fiction arises: factual and often programmatic comments on the fictional mode of writing are embedded within the fictional text.

So, the metafictional text erects an ontological wall between language and reality. By doing so, it weakens the relevance of the textual trace as regards the truth that is out there. At the same time, the deconstructive character of metafiction also aims at its source, the writer. Ironically, the author, as the

originator of the text, tones down his own voice in applying the metafictional practice. As he knows that his artefact will never exhaustively cover reality, his importance as the messenger of epistemological meaning dwindles. This is closely connected to the Death of the Author which Roland Barthes and other literary theorists proclaim in their argument on intertextuality. In practice, this keeping down of the authorial voice is to be discerned in the words of a self-reflexive narrator who refers to his incapacity to grasp the truth beyond the textual world. Doubt can also be cast upon the narrator's or writer's authority by splitting the narrative and dividing it among several narrators.

As with many postmodern concerns, the text's assertion of its fictionality contains a paradox. It first stresses its independence as an artefact and its divergence from fact/reality, but it can only do this by presenting this 'autonomy' in a strange hybrid of fact and fiction. This again relates to the difficulty of drawing the line between fact and fiction which we discussed in the previous chapter. The intertextual drive holds factual and fictional writing together and accounts for more similarities than any of the modes probably cares for. Or, as Paul de Man puts it, "the binary opposition between fiction and fact is no longer relevant: in any differential system, it is the assertion of the space *between* the entities that matters" (quoted in Hutcheon 1988a:113). The importance of this space between – but then in relation to clashing and interactive voices – had already been marked by Bakhtin in his argument on dialogism, and will be of further importance in the discussion of psychoanalytic literary criticism applied to *The Cunning Man* (see chapter 6).

Hutcheon paints the metafictional idea in a hue of self-obsession. For her, the postmodernist tradition of metafiction is not an unnatural idea. Storytelling has always played a part in our culture, so it would not be incongruous to reflect upon storytelling itself, to talk about storytelling, and consequently to include the talk on storytelling in the narration itself. Hutcheon calls this preoccupation of storytelling with its own subject *narcissistic narrative*. She thus reverts to the canonical myth of Narcissus. In doing so, she indicates that the possibility of an entity (man or text) reflecting on its own has been inherent in our culture for a very long time. Moreover, she claims, Freud's psychology has uncovered narcissism as the "universal original condition of man, making it the basis of more than just pathological behaviour" (Hutcheon 1980:2). So, she argues, it is not surprising that many texts other than postmodernist have "within itself the seeds of a 'narcissistic' reading, of an interpretation which would make it an allegorical or metaphoric exploration of the process of articulating a literary world" (Hutcheon 1980:23).

However, what is typical of the postmodernist novel is that it openly plays with this narcissistic narrative act. The text blatantly forces the reader to recognize its solipsistic infatuation by including metafictional self-commentary. Postmodernism has added to the self-obsessive seed the amount of water the narcissus needed to grow.

Hutcheon lists a number of novelistic techniques which foreground the text's explicit preoccupation with storytelling, or in more theoretical terms, the text's *overt diegetic narcissism*. The ones relevant to this discussion are parody, mise en abyme, and the use of the detective genre.

Parody pays tribute to the metafictional in the sense that it always presupposes a previous mode of writing which has become obsolete. It then at once uses its conventions and abuses them, and in doing so, it ponders over the literary paradigm of both the past, and over its contemporary mode.

Mise en abyme is self-obsessive in a more metaphysical way. It is a writerly technique which places a story within the story. By means of traces of embedding, such as pitting a 'real' fictive story against a fantastical one, a twentieth-century narrative versus a nineteenth-century one, etc., different worlds are created. So, it builds an ontological boundary between the story and the story-within-the-story. However, mise en abyme is typical in that it disrupts these boundaries by mirroring the stories. Elements of the embedding level resemble those of the embedded level, or embedding elements will even creep over the ontological border into the embedded story, or vice versa. Because of this, the ontological frame is disrupted and different worlds blend in with one another. The limits of the textual worlds are thus corrupted.

Mise en abyme, however, is only one aspect and indeed an intense intratextual exploitation of what the postmodernist theoretician Brian McHale calls *Chinese-box structures*. By this, he means any structure which consists of different narrative levels that contain each other. This recursive structure always functions in the service of postmodern ontology. It aims at the erection and at the same time at the destruction of the limits between different worlds. The Chinese-box structure can then be extended to another level, namely to that outside the text, which is the extradiegetic level of writer and reader. As a result, the answer to the question of which story is the primary one is no longer straightforward but complex, and fact and fiction again become blurred. The technique of the narrative Chinese boxes – including mise en abyme – in this way represents just another brick in the wall of postmodern ontology.

What is more, the postmodernist novel's use of recursive structures is also narcissistic. By mixing the extra- and intradiegetic spheres, the author and his text or the reader and the characters sit nicely together in a blissful no man's land between reality and text. The postmodernist novel, then, is characterized by presenting love, a theme which literature has scrutinized since at least the Middle Ages (McHale 1987:222), as a structural or metafictional device by

> *modelling* […] erotic relations through foregrounded violations of ontological boundaries. […] Love, then, is less an object of representation than a *meta*object, less a theme than a *meta*theme. It characterizes not the fictional interactions *in* the text's world, but rather the interactions *between* the text and its world on the one hand, and the reader or his or her world on the other.
>
> (McHale 1987:227)

The use of the detective genre accounts for the second pillar of postmodern insecurity, namely epistemological doubt. According to Hutcheon, the detective novel shows three main characteristics with respect to metafiction: it is extremely self-aware of its form, it is highly conventionalized and it draws largely on the active hermeneutic participation of the reader. The postmodernist tradition pushes formal self-awareness to its limit, and parodies the conventions of the detective genre. Typically, the reader's quest for textual truth meets with several dead ends and is by extension allegorical of the quest for knowledge outside the text.

SELF-LOVE IN *THE CUNNING MAN*

> Faced with that Morris *Golden Legend* I fell in love, in one of the few really rewarding romances of my life: I fell in love with beautiful books, and now, as an old man, I have a harem which is by no means trivial.
>
> (Robertson Davies, *The Cunning Man*, p. 74)

The Cunning Man, as Davies's last novel, presents his work in its most mature form with respect to metafiction. As will be explored later (see chapter 6), Davies's growth towards metafictional writing countered his previous occupation with Jungianism. Thus, it is to be expected that the text of *The Cunning Man* in a first episode draws attention to its status as an artefact which differs from reality.

Self-reflective words

In the novel, the linguistic artefact asserts its existence through a continual reference to the act of writing. The narrator and Cunning Man of the story, the physician Jonathan Hullah, basically tells the story of his life in the form of a confession. His narrative is set off by Ms. Esme Barron, a journalist from the Toronto newspaper *The Colonial Advocate*. However, from the beginning of the novel, the reader gathers that what he is reading is Hullah's memoir. Hullah entrusts his life story to what he calls his Case Book, which, as the reader learns later on, is in fact a book that he initially bought for his medical practice to keep records of his patients. On the second page of the novel, Hullah says that he keeps a memoir to hide his 'real' story from Esme.

> I was certainly not going to tell Ms. Esme Barron, of the Colonial Advocate, everything I knew. If I leave a few notes on the story in my poorly kept Case Book, somebody may find it when I am dead. What they will find is much more than "a few notes" but when I wrote this I did not know how much my story would possess me. I had no intention of confiding in this very attractive, tactful young woman, whom I did not trust an inch.
>
> (CM 10)

Further, the story is recounted alternately through the voice of Hullah as he is sitting with Esme and through Hullah's perspective when he was writing his Case Book. The narrative situation, then, is doubled. Davies's narrator, Jonathan Hullah, tells the primary story. This account embraces the conversation between Hullah and Esme, which takes place at the end of the twentieth century in Toronto. This interview deals only with a part of Hullah's life. The primary diegetic level is simultaneously narrated. However, Davies's narrator, Hullah, takes turns with Hullah's narrator, i.e. Jonathan Hullah of the memoir. He employs a retrospective narration, in contrast with the Hullah as Davies's storyteller. The secondary narrative is jotted down in the Case Book and covers the full life story of Hullah from his childhood in Sioux Lookout in Northern Ontario, Canada, until he actually starts writing his Case Book. To his memoir, Hullah confides what he dare not tell Esme out of fear that she might find out something disconcerting.

> There are depths in me that Esme will never explore, nor do I suppose she wants to do so. But those depths lie below anything I may tell her. And they must be explored in some degree in this narrative in my Case Book.
>
> (CM 19)

In the novel, Hullah continually makes references to his writing of the memoir: "this narrative in my Case Book" (CM 19), "I am writing in my Case Book, a handsome leather-bound volume" (CM 118), "I really must put on the brakes or this Case Book, which I intend only as an *aide-mémoire*, will turn into one of those German Bildungsromanen, about the growth of the human spirit" (CM 175).

Hullah does not only acknowledge his actual writing of the memoir, he also persistently reviews what he has taken down. "My intention was merely to write a few notes, to separate what I thought it prudent to tell Esme from what I know about Charlie and the affair at St. Aidan's, but I seem to be writing an extended memoir" (CM 117). "I see that I have scampered through several years of my university life without a mention of Charlie or Brocky" (CM 162). "As I look back at what I have written, I ask myself if I am being quite honest?" (CM 221). "As I reread what I have written I am dismayed by the confusion of tenses and the order of time" (CM 269). Thus, as an alter ego of Davies, Hullah is very self-conscious about his writing. By analogy, the same might then be said of Davies himself.

Further, Hullah mentions the location where the memoir is born: "the tower, where my writing-desk is, and where, in fact, I am making these notes" (CM 257). This obviously relates to the stock image of the ivory tower, which is used pejoratively to refer to writers who retreat from reality to a more enclosed space, where they can occupy themselves with writing literature which is often antisocial. This symbol, however, is at the same time parodied. Hullah's ivory tower is situated at the top of his residence, which is in fact a transformed horse stable. The purpose of the parody is double. First, Davies attacks conservative writing. But moreover, he also defies the reactionary image which some critics attributed to him. He argues against this kind of literary icon which he undeservedly got, by writing the same fiction, but now with both his feet standing in horse dung. The parody thus also serves Davies to counter the negative criticism which associated him with conservative establishment writing.

His opponents also ran him down on the basis of his academic training and his status as Professor at the University of Toronto and Master of Massey College. He puts this fact into perspective as well, by applying the same parody of the ivory tower to the academic bon ton in the novel. At Colborne College, Hullah and the rest of his trinity, Professor of English literature Brochwel Gilmartin and Charlie Iredale, priest to be, take part in a few elitist clubs that are somehow connected with the college. One of them is the Curfew Club, which is the habitat of the school's finest intellectuals, and which throws philosophical, literary and even scientific subjects on the table for discussion.

> We met on Sunday nights in a room in the tower, an architectural mishap, for it was fifteen feet tall, and its windows were at the ten-foot level; the tower clock was accessible through a trapdoor in the roof, and could be heard mumbling and cursing to itself at all hours.
>
> (CM 68)

The architectural failure of "that curious tower chamber" (CM 73) where the intellectual club meets symbolizes the ridiculousness of the group's aloofness and pedantry.

At one of the meetings of the Curfew Club, in a witty paper entitled "A Knotty Point of Shakespeare Criticism Untied: Where Did Hamlet Hide the Body of Polonius?", Brocky glaringly suggests that Shakespeare might have been constipated. Paying attention to the original text of *Hamlet*, he ponders over where the body of Polonius was stashed after his death in the fight with Hamlet. By means of a few cunning perceptions in his reading, he concludes that it must be locked away in the privy, which was not, or at least very infrequently, used by the King, and that consequently, the King's rear was firmly plugged up. The question whether this tells anything about Shakespeare himself is left open, but Davies's argument goes home. He – literally – shows the underside of the most canonical figure of English literature. Adding to this that he wrote his thesis on Shakespeare and that he was an expert on the subject through his affiliation with and his being a writer of drama – he also cuts his own throat. Thus, he again unmasks his allegedly conservative voice as a misconception and basically just gives his readers a good laugh.

Davies's parody of himself and that of the academic world do not cease here. At the staging of *Faust* in *The Cunning Man*, he mocks the scholars who criticize their performance, and who never stop looking for a message in the play instead of leaving it for what it is.

> Art is always in peril at universities, where there are so many people, young and old, who love art less than argument, and dote upon a text that provides the nutritious pemmican on which scholars love to chew.
>
> (CM 187)

And further, Hullah's friend Brochwel Gilmartin, Professor of English literature, is made a cuckold of by no less a person than Hullah himself. The story has it that Nuala, the love of Hullah's life, eventually decides to marry his best friend Brocky. However, Hullah and Nuala keep seeing each other and there are even intimations that Conor Gilmartin is Hullah's son, and not Brocky's. The theme of adultery is supported by two classic stories in the English canon. The first one is Chaucer's

Miller's Tale, in which the Miller is cuckolded by his young wife Alison and the scholar Nicolas. The other one is represented by the Arthurian material. At the same time Davies grossly parodies the latter story.

> Artistically, everything was wrong with the resolution of my affair with Nuala. It had been passionate love in the beginning, and those student days, and the afternoons in the Ford Hotel, were as glorious to me as anything in literature or in art. The continuance of our love for several years after her marriage had for me as powerful a savour as the deception of King Arthur by his dearest friend, Lancelot of the Lake – the subjection of loyalty to passion. But the conclusion! Suspicion, and instead of a manly confrontation, resort to a private detective; a muted row in the dining-room of the York Club; a merry drunken threesome in my study, with everybody kissing everybody else and an acceptance of what, by all the rules of art, should have been utterly unacceptable.
>
> (CM 387-388)

The parody is obvious. Davies openly lays bare the fictional conventions of a past mode of art and scandalously mocks them. He first has Hullah say that his passion for Nuala equals that of many romances in literature, and then subverts it by inscribing in it the popular genre of the detective novel. In this way, he "settle[s] the hash of [Brocky's] wife's lover *by the most conventional means*" (CM 388, my italics). So, he shamelessly pulls the Arthurian English tradition off its pedestal and abuses it in a story of – God forbid – Canadians. He even alludes to the attic of the Americas: "Worst of all I saw myself not as Lancelot of the Lake, the self-hating adulterer, and decidedly *not as the figure in the centre ring of the circus, but as a sideshow* in the lives of the two people I loved best" (CM 388, my italics). Davies thus deflowers the English centre, and appropriates it to himself to write his ordinary Canadian characters into the literary tradition. In his mockery of the English canon, he shows the relativity and mutability of artistic conventions.

> Artistically I suppose I should have shot myself, leaving a message saying, "I forgive you all." But I really had no appetite for suicide and I came at last to a recognition of myself as, *in part,* a Tom Sawyer who wanted everything done according to the rules of romantic fiction, and complicated simple situations with his absurd adolescent, book-born nonsense.
>
> (CM 388)

This extract, together with the previous one, shows that Davies wraps up parody in metafictional concerns and that he uses it both for his own purpose, and for that of the literary periphery to which he belongs. The passage quoted above, and especially, the *in part* idea, will be of further significance in the discussion of Hullah's central role in the novel as writer and trickster (see chapter 5).

Hullah and Davies overtly draw attention to the act of *poesis*. In doing so, they claim fiction into being. However, they also point out the inability of fiction to grasp any truth beyond the text. Fiction, being an artefact of language, can only do what potential language can, i.e. create its own world and its own truths: "Everything I am lies behind everything I say" (CM 20). Language creates its own world(s), so it does not coincide with existence, if there is any at all outside the linguistic construct. Language can never exhaustively cogitate upon reality, so neither can anything that is made out of language. Language and literature cut the phenomenal world into pieces by making a selection of a whole they cannot overlook. The linguistic constantly changes and edits. In his memoir, Hullah relates his encounters with Mrs. Elsie Smoke, the "wise woman" (CM 28) of the Native community of Ojibway Indians and Métis to which Hullah lives close in Sioux Lookout. He tries to be as objective as possible about one of their conversations, but he soon finds out that objectivity is an illusion.

> I had many a fine talk with Mrs. Smoke. It would be tedious to recount them, and impossible to render her part in comprehensible English, because when she wanted to push me away, so to speak, she drifted more and more into the Red River patois of which I did not understand one word in ten. So let me give you the drift of all those talks in a single dialogue, in which I put Mrs. Smoke's words in ordinary English, as a few of the Indians spoke it; that leaves out a great deal of the flavour of what was said, but what else can I do?
>
> (CM 39)

So, Hullah is very aware of the transformative character of language. Mrs. Smoke's thoughts are transferred into a language she barely speaks, which Hullah then in his turn edits for clearer comprehension.

He is also very attentive to this when he is writing on the past: "As I look back towards those days, I think I must have been a hateful child. I understand that the judgement of an old man, and such an old man as I have become, on his childhood self cannot be truly objective" (CM 44), "Or so it seems to me now" (CM 154). He also openly points to the deceiving and fragmentary nature of his Case Book: "However, this is not a history, but a casual notebook, and as I am not writing it for other eyes – not yet, at least – enquirers will have to make of it what they can" (CM 429).

However, Hullah is ambiguous about the epistemological capacities of language. On the one hand, he claims that the text diverges from reality, on the other hand, he seems to testify to the opposite. " 'So, you won't know what to think till you've read it in a book,' said my father. And I knew well and truly that he was not stupid"

(CM 139). Discourse here seems to have access to knowledge in the real world. Davies's irony may grin behind the text, though. In *The Lyre of Orpheus* (1988), he has a character say the exact opposite of what is on Hullah's mind in *The Cunning Man*.

> In *The Lyre of Orpheus* […] [t]he auto-reflexive elements include an explicit discussion of "fiction vs. reality," summarized in Schnak's exasperated remark: "Oh, somebody in a book! All you people like Nilla and the Cornishes and that man Darcourt seem to live out of books. As if everything was in books!"
>
> (Christ 2000:107).

By analogy, the quote from *The Cunning Man* may very well reveal in an ironical way that Davies is pulling the reader's leg and testing whether he is paying attention to the linguistic faculty for trickery.

The same appears to hold true in a passage of Hullah's *Anatomy of Fiction*. His *Anatomy* is the result of a concept which he says started growing in the course of his medical career, but which really traces back to Brocky's paper at the Curfew Club. It explores the traces on the medical condition of characters that fictional texts of the past divulge or conceal. It applies "modern medical theory to the notable characters of literature" (CM 377). Basically, it is an extension of Hullah's presupposition that "body and soul cannot be separated while life lasts" (CM 439). Keeping this in mind, the *Anatomy* explores why literary characters act and think the way they do, and corroborates this with the medical details on these characters which escape from the text. Though Hullah never completes the book and the reader of *The Cunning Man* is only left with a series of disconnected notes, the basic idea is clear. It shows how moral and literary conventions of a past period may inhibit the writer from releasing clinical details on his characters, and how a book may trick the reader with regard to knowledge and truth.

> Henry James's very intelligent little Maisie knew a great deal that her biographer tells us, and undoubtedly a great many things about the sexual life of her elders which her author knew she knew, but was forbidden by convention from telling us. Of course I, the well-read Dr. Hullah, know these things, but it is only now that my experience strikes home, and I understand that the love in literature and the love in life are one, and that the intelligent reader must bring his own experience to supplement the experience of the novel he holds in his hand.
>
> (CM 391)

The passage is at first sight rather puzzling. It states that "the love in literature and the love in life are one" and thus that fiction and real life are very much alike.

Moreover, Hullah speaks of Henry James as the biographer of Maisie, thereby evoking a writerly genre that pretends to be factual. These elements contradict the philosophy that Hullah got across before, i.e. that the text mocks and transforms reality, and that it can only proffer a distorted, self-loving mirror of it.

Conversely, the quote also points in the other direction. James does not convey a realistic vision of the characters he has in mind. The real Maisie he imagines is cut into pieces and transformed in his novel by the creative faculty of writing, out of which a literary Maisie comes into being. In addition, the literary Maisie is not equal to the read Maisie, i.e. the Maisie we make of the textual character. The intertextual nature of language and of our constructed reality makes us connect the literary Maisie with other Maisies from our literary baggage or from our experience. So, in a nutshell, there are in fact three different Maisies. What Maisie knew was neither what James knew of her, nor what we know of her. The reason for this diversity is the transformative and creative character of language and of the linguistic artefact. Both the act of writing and the act of reading account for the permutation of the Maisies.

This being so, love in literature and in life are paradoxically both equal and different. They refer to the same love, but the different discourses or existences edit it, focus on various aspects of it, and leave out information either consciously or unconsciously. It is then the task of the reader to picture love or Maisie as complete as possible by engaging the intertextual drive: "the intelligent reader must bring his own experience to the novel he holds in hand" (CM 391). The creative act of reading closes the ontological gap partially.

It is important to stress that the closure of the ontological abyss can never be complete. Though Hullah tries to connect reality with fiction, and to see them as coincidental entities, Davies clearly implicates that his endeavour is bound to fail.

> I recognized that I was falling victim to the author's obsession, which is that he relates whatever life presents to him to the book he is writing or plans to write. I have not begun on my *Anatomy of Fiction*, but it is beginning to dominate my mind.
>
> (CM 408)

Davies speaks of Hullah's urge to couple up fact with fiction as an "author's obsession", which dominates his mind. By this, Davies clearly indicates that he realizes that the representational fancy is in the end a fallacy.

Again, the main point is that in factual writing, the intertextual drive is kept down and that in fictional discourse, it is exploited. The more *différance*, dialogism,

parody or intertextuality – used in the broad sense – is put into the text, the more the text is unrepresentative with regard to the factual world out there. The more discourse asserts its artefactual and unnatural status, the more life and text will differ. One of the signals of the artefact is the use of conventions. "If life happened along the lines of popular fiction, Charlie should have died after his confession to me, but life has a different sense of dramatic form" (CM 446). In the postmodernist tradition, then, these conventions are subverted. By pointing to the conventions of another mode of writing, *in casu* popular fiction, the postmodernist writer Davies shows all his cards and makes clear that also he cannot escape conventions. Consequently, his comment that Charlie's death is real in contrast with the death of characters in popular fiction, is to be taken ironically. Every mode of discourse is characterized by conventions, and so is his. And it is precisely these conventions that keep the parodical game alive.

Davies's fascination with illusion and how reality may be distorted stems from his passion for the theatre. His Oxford B. Litt. thesis, *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*, deals with the Shakespearean convention that women's roles were always played by boys or young men. This was not a problem for the Renaissance audience, as they had the imagination to put the convention aside, and to see the actor on the stage as the character he plays, and not as the real person. So, Davies points out, in the theatre, both the actor and the audience need the power of imagination.

> It needs imagination to play a fairy or a witch in broad daylight, and the Elizabethan theatre must have been a great breeder of imagination, for nothing daunted it, and not merely Oberon and Titania, but Caliban, Puck, and Ariel walked its enchanted stage.
>
> (quoted in Monk 1982:23)

For the spectator of art, it is very easy, however, to disregard the fact that in all creative products, conventions are present. For instance, nineteenth-century classical realism was highly conventionalised in the representation of its characters and events. Through authorial omniscience, direct definitions and other narrative devices, it put forward the illusion that what the reader was reading was true to life. And eventually, when convention persists, the illusion is forgotten. Wherever convention abides, the lapse into illusion is conceivable.

A writerly genre that is highly conventionalised and popularised and that is also parodied in *The Cunning Man* is the detective novel. The presence of the genre is immediately brought up at the beginning of the novel: "Should I have taken the false teeth? In my years as a police surgeon I would certainly have done so; who

can say what might be clinging to them, or in the troughs that fit over the gums?" (CM 9).

The main characteristic of the crime story is its search for truth. The figure of *The Cunning Man* that is burdened with the quest for knowledge is the journalist Esme Barron. For her series *The Toronto That Was*, which is to appear in *The Colonial Advocate*, she must know everything concerning the mysterious death of Father Hobbes at St. Aidan's on the morning of Good Friday. Therefore, she calls on Dr. Jonathan Hullah, who as a parishioner is closely connected to what happened. In her interviews with him, Esme constantly stresses that she must find the real story and the very facts about Hobbes's death: "Tell me exactly what happened" (CM 12), "I'm trying to get the real story about his death" (CM 13). The journalistic interview often sounds more like a cross-examination that is controlled by detective Barron. In fact, she doubles as a representative of both journalism and the detective department.

In her quest for truth, she is constantly thwarted by her interviewee, Jonathan Hullah. He repeatedly keeps her off when she tries to dig too deep.

> I shall have to watch my step with Ms. Esme Barron. Not that there is anything in the least dishonest about her, but she has the unresting curiosity of the really good journalist, and a technique of cross-examination that is worse than anything one usually meets with in the law courts. I have been an expert witness many times, especially in my police surgeon days, and I know that lawyers like to be subtle, even when they have little gift for it. But journalists like Esme are not subtle, they ask direct, intrusive, and disconcerting questions, and are quick to spot any evasion. They will stick to a point when you are eager to get away from it; they are implacable, and, if you do not answer a question, they will hint that you are furtive.
>
> (CM 14)

And so Hullah keeps away crucial information from Esme, and he persists in doing so throughout the story. Esme never gets to the whole story, even not when the reader does.

The full facts of the case come to the surface in Hullah's memoir. In his Case Book, he writes the words that are forbidden to be conveyed to Esme. The hierarchy of the epistemological genres, then, is inverted and in this way parodied: the highly subjective memoir finally reveals the truth, while the detective plot only reaches a dead end.

Esme is not only a detective, she is also a journalist. The representational fallacy does not only prevail in the writings of the novelist, *in casu* in the memoir and in the detective genre, but also in modes of discourse which assert to present

fact. The main representative of this kind of writing in *The Cunning Man* is journalistic writing. Hullah questions the objectivity of journalism and queries the neutrality of the story which Esme wishes to convey to the readers of *The Colonial Advocate*: "she is back on the job, pursuing the 'story' which she believes this village-like section of Toronto contains" (CM 429). Obviously, the quotation marks of 'story' are significant. Further reference to the purported objectivity of journalism is ample. Journalistic writing, pre-eminently and almost by definition the most factual of all discourse, is continually put to the test of neutrality.

> She is a journalist and an interviewer who does not dig very deep, because if she did so she might blur the clarity of the "story" she will eventually write for her paper […] How many interviewers, I wonder, have any conception of the complexity of the creature they are interrogating? Do they really believe that what they can evoke from their subject is the whole of the "story"? Not the best interviewers, surely. Esme is not bad, but she desires clarity above all else, and clarity is not a characteristic of the human spirit. What I shall tell her will all be true in so far as it goes, but in terms of the reality of the "story" she is seeking, with the energy of a terrier after a rat, what I shall tell her will not even be half what I know.
>
> (CM 19-20)

Hullah consciously withholds information from Esme, and thereby diminishes the objective validity of the story which Esme is trying to ease away from her interviewee.

Journalistic distortion, however, does not only arise from the interviewee; also the journalist himself, in his role as a mediator, unconsciously or consciously does away with truthful accuracy. Hullah accuses Hugh McWearie, editor of the *Colonial Advocate*, of doing so: "Journalism has rotted your respect for truth" (CM 272). Although he acknowledges that McWearie is a very fine journalist, even one of the very best, Hullah cannot believe that the journalist's lens is not covered with patches of dirt, and that it does not magnify what the journalist deems worthy of highlighting.

> "I am of the old school," said he. "My job is to give the facts, so far as I can discover them, and leave the reader to make up his own mind. […] I shall offer no opinion of my own." I could not accept that. "Hugh," said I, "when it suits you you slant and load your stories unconscionably. The pretensions of you journalists that you deal simply in fact would be nauseating if it were not laughable."
>
> (CM 343)

The same holds true for Esme: "All of which Esme took in quietly and surely; she was of that blessed class of journalists who do not rely on a tape-recorder, but

on a first-rate memory which *absorbs and edits* as it listens" (CM 430, my italics). At the end of the story, then, it is not surprising that Esme chooses to resign. Once she has found a new husband who can support her financially, she moves on to become, most probably, a writer of literature.

> And for me, it means the end of having to struggle about a career, and be a mother at the same time; I can get on with my real writing, and look for the best in me. […] Because I think I'm a cut above daily journalism. I think I've got something real to say, if I can just have time to settle down to it.
> (CM 463)

Ironically, Esme believes that literature, rather than journalism, has "something to say".

The references to journalism indirectly relate to Davies. Before he got into the academic world of Toronto, he had been both literary editor of *Saturday Night*, a renowned opinion journal, and columnist for his father's newspaper, *The Peterborough Examiner*, of which he had later taken up the editorship (Diamond-Nigh 1997: 8). He was already writing fiction and drama at the time. But when he was offered the position of Master of Massey College in Toronto, he eagerly took the chance to leave journalistic writing, and to get into the academic world, which eventually allowed him to write the fiction that yielded him international acclaim. Esme's move from journalism to literature thus epitomizes that of Davies himself. What is more, not only Hullah is an alter ego of Davies, also Hugh McWearie, editor of *The Colonial Advocate*, is an exponent of the Canadian novelist. In mocking McWearie's ostensible journalistic objectivity, he explains that also he had been unable to provide the newspaper reader with irrefutable fact.

Colliding worlds

It should now be clear that Davies's *The Cunning Man* abounds with references to writing. In this way, the novel is firmly rooted in the metafictional postmodernist tradition. But next to the many overt and covert allusions to the act of writing, most of the novel's characters are writers as well. The writing figures can also be grouped. Esme Barron, Conor Gilmartin, who is the son of Brochwel and who dies in the story, and Hugh McWearie, *Colonial Advocate* editor, are journalists. Then there is Hullah, who writes his memoir in his Case Book, and finally, Miss Pansy Freake Todhunter, Chips for friends, who writes herself into existence in her letters to her artistic friend in England, Barbara Hepworth.

Each set of these writers constitutes a different mode of discourse. Esme, Conor and Hugh obviously stand for the factual writing of journalism. Esme's interview with Hullah triggers the implementation of Hullah's Case Book. His memoir is of a more spontaneous, less structured and fragmentary nature and deals with what information he deems necessary to hold back from the journalists. The Case Book is written in the manner of a confession. Chips's letters represent the epistolary mode and inscribe *The Cunning Man* in the tradition of the epistolary novel.

These three different narratives relate to the same story, but they tackle the matter in a different way. They vary with regard to style and form. The journalistic text is very concise and factual, and refuses to deal with superfluous matter. The memoir is generated by Hullah's unconscious and consequently is more of a ragbag than an objective report. Chips writes in a "schoolgirl-slangy vein of […] speech" (CM 250), and her composition does not appear to be very structured. Her letters do have their value, however, as they are beautifully crafted, and as they have enclosed etchings which focus on several events or characters she speaks about in her letters.

The narrative trinity also differs in terms of content. What is kept secret for Esme comes to the surface in the memoir. Chips only puts down what she knows from her experience. So, each discourse constructs a different version of the reality of the story.

This being so, the death of Father Ninian Hobbes, an event of massive importance in the novel, is recounted thrice. It first appears at the beginning of the novel, in the interview with Hullah. Esme commands that he be very close to the accurate truth: "Tell me exactly what happened" (CM 12), "But, just before I go, tell me – I'm trying to get the real story about his death, because there was some talk of a saint, later on, wasn't there?" (CM 13). In the interview, Hullah devotes very few words to the event, despite the impact it had on the parish of St. Aidan's. His words resemble those of the standard journalist: they are concise, factual, condensed and any emotion is left out. He also keeps Esme off when she tries to get more information out of him. In a later interview, Hullah adds the attempt of Father Charlie to make Hobbes into a saint. Again, he seems to be very brief and cool about the whole business. After that, the story is hushed up and makes space for the narration of Hullah's life in his memoir.

The event of Hobbes's death is narrated a second time at about the start of the last third part of the novel. This happens in the letters of Chips. The story basically is the same, but there are a few differences. Chips is more elaborate than Hullah, both on the actual passing away of the old man and on the attempt at saint

making. She also shows more affection than the doctor, which obviously relates to the specific situation in which her storytelling takes place, i.e. the letter-writing, and with Hullah's covering up of the facts.

The true version of the facts at last comes to the surface near the end of the book. Charlie has in the meantime become an advanced alcoholic and is in the care of Dr. Hullah. He signs his death certificate when he relapses and is then moved into Glebe House, the mansion of Chips and her life companion Emily Raven-Hart, who has meanwhile got cancer and is also at death's door. On his deathbed, Charlie confesses to Hullah that in his schoolboy years, he was visited in his dreams by whom he took for Christ and by whom he was asked to do things in favour of Christianity. Unfortunately, the trickster kept haunting Charlie and eventually persuaded him to kill Hobbes and promote him to sainthood. All of this is recounted in Hullah's memoir. His Case Book thus serves as a ragbag of his repressed memory and eventually takes the steam off the kettle of his unconscious. Through his writing down of the events, he manages to clear his conscience. In this account, writing functions as an act of healing: "So my handsome Case Book has only two or three old entries, and the pages beyond are virgin. But it shall not be wasted. I shall become my own *Case*. Physician, [heal thyself]. Take your own medicine" (CM 118).

So, the three narrations each constitute their own paradigm, both with regard to content and form. Taking into account Hullah's "Everything I am lies behind everything I say" (CM 20), and adding to that "Everything I am lies behind *how* I say it/*how* I speak", language behaves as an instrument to create one's own paradigms, or even further, one's own worlds. It does not reflect One Whole Reality, it is very individual and breeds one's own separate realities. Through the medium of language, then, the end of the Grand Narrative of Narrative is proclaimed. There is no longer, nor has there ever been, one great authoritative story that applies to all. So, in *The Cunning Man*, any preachy attitude that was attributed to Davies by adversaries is countered by the birth of different worlds through different words.

Davies had also applied this technique in *The Cornish Trilogy.* In a critical evaluation of *The Rebel Angels* (1981), Barbara Godard writes:

> Davies' use of intercutting limited points of view gives perspective and objectivity while remaining myopic and self-centred … In doing so he opens up the interpretations of incidents to many possibilities. As the reader becomes aware when confronting their opposition (for example, the conflicting views about Froats's research), the oppositions cancel each other

> out but the book contains them both. There is no single authoritative vision of truth. The author becomes a liar, raising the self-referential paradox, or else becomes an arranger and organizer of conflicting positions. In either case, the artifice of fiction is unmasked, the realistic illusion destroyed.
>
> (quoted in Christ 2000:96)

The quote points out that through the splitting of the narrative over different characters, the Grand Originator of meaning is crossed out including Davies's voice as the father of his novel. Davies self-consciously pulls (his) authority down its pedestal. In *The Cunning Man*, he rebukes his alter ego Hullah for clinging to authority.

> "Who said that?" I asked.
> "Emily Dickinson, if it matters. Pyke, you really ought to get over demanding authorities and attributions for everything."
>
> (CM 104)

Moreover, metafictional concerns like these lay bare the fictitiousness of the narrative and destroy the representational fallacy.

Gabrielle Christ spots the same suspicion towards Truth in *What's Bred In The Bone* (1985).

> Both in the biographical narrative and in the angel's discussion various subjective truths are contrasted with each other, which suggest that the question of Truth as an absolute concept is one of the central themes of the novel. […] [T]he question arises whether Darcourt's search for the "true Francis Cornish" can ever be successful, whether any collection of facts can ever amount to a complete and true whole.
>
> (Christ 2000:102)

This also shows that the postmodern insecurity about ontology and that concerning epistemology are frequently intertwined. Here, the creation of different yet equivalent worlds with equally valid world-views connects to the uncertainty of ever attaining comprehension of One Absolute Reality.

Authority is not only annihilated by presenting the narrative through distinct perspectives, the separate stories are also very aware of their inability to grasp one single meaning (see supra). On the journalistic level, Hullah's speech is edited through Esme and in her writing down of it. In the memoir, Hullah is conscious that he cannot run away from the distortion that arises from his retrospective narrative. And finally, even Chips's letters are very aware of the presence of language and of linguistic constructs as something different from reality:

> I swear to you I felt that for the first time in my life I knew what religion really meant! It was a kind of amazing lightness in the buzzem – O hell, I can't write about it in this campy slangy way I've got into – this way that tries to turn everything into a joke! […] I don't think I'm making much sense, but I hope I'm getting it across to you that it was a revelation.
> (CM 338)

So, the different discourses in *The Cunning Man* form a structure of various layers. Through the device of language, distinct worlds are created. This reminds us of McHale's narrative onions. He speaks of *Chinese boxes* or *Russian babushka-dolls* (McHale 1987:112) in order to illustrate that metafictional texts often contain different worlds in a recursive hierarchy. Of course literature in the past, such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* or Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, resorted to this practice as well. The specificity of the postmodernist use of Chinese-box structures is that its texts flaunt their ontological boundaries. In this way, the narrative hierarchy is subverted.

This subversion can be attained through different processes. One of them is mirroring. In *The Cunning Man*, the mirroring is not so intense as to speak of a mise en abyme. The three worlds in the novel relate to the same events, so a mise en abyme is technically impossible. There are, however, some points of comparison between the various discourses. The three characters which constitute their own world are all writers. Apart from that, in her letters, Chips sometimes touches on the same subjects or even on the same specific intertexts to which Hullah refers in his memoir, without them chatting on the matter or having anything in common with these issues outside of their writing. For instance, she brings up the actor Henry Irving (CM 285), who also appears in Dr. Hullah's Case Book (CM 148, 225). They also isolatedly refer to Wagner's Valkyries (CM 260, 465). Freud, a major intertext in Hullah's memoir, is adduced in Chips's letters (CM 252). The same holds true for Dickens (CM 255, 314 and the many allusions to the classical realist writer in Hullah's memoir: CM 58, 251, 377, 398-399, 434, 456). The Russian realist Tolstoy passes as well (CM 253, 435). This 'mirroring' most likely has more to do with Davies's inability to suppress his showing off his knowledge, than with real mirroring effects like those of the mise en abyme technique.

Further, narrative hierarchy is, according to McHale, corrupted through a high frequency of interruption. This means that primary and secondary narratives alternately take the lead. This is certainly the case in *The Cunning Man*. Interview and memoir, memoir and letters, and interview and letters race a fast relay. This is especially the case with the alternation between Chips's letters and Hullah's memoir.

Next, there is also what McHale calls "logical paradoxes of various kinds" (1987:114). One instance of this is the travelling of characters over the boundaries of the story they take part in. A figure in the story may suddenly realize that he or she is playing the role of a character and may then withdraw from his or her story, and take up a position in another narrative on a different level of the recursive structure. In this way, the various worlds collide and the ontological boundaries between the different stories are undercut.

The latter does not happen in the novel under discussion, at least not with the three discourses/worlds that Davies creates. These various discourses relate the same story, so this is not even possible. However, there are two instances of transgression, but then in connection with the level higher than the diegetic one. One level up the text is that of the author. Ontological transgression can then occur when the writer inserts an alter ego of himself inside the story he is putting down. The result of this is a distortion, or a short-circuit of the boundaries between the world of the author and that of his characters.

> The level of the fictional world and the ontological level occupied by the author as maker of the fictional world collapse together; the result is something like a short-circuit of the ontological structure. […] It constitutes a *topos* of postmodernist writing: the *topos* of the face-to-face interview between the author and his character.
>
> (McHale 1987:213)

John Fowles applied this technique in *The French Lieutenant's Woman.* Davies read Fowles (Davis 1989:269), and was sometimes even referred to by critics as the Canadian John Fowles (Davis 1989:70), so it would not be surprising if he also practised this technique of blending. In his *Anatomy of Fiction*, Hullah praises Tolstoy for providing his readers with many medical details on the life of his characters. Then, he turns to the impending death of his friends Charlie Iredale and Emily Raven-Hart.

> Tolstoy neglects no clinical details. Do I wish more authors would follow his example? On the whole, I think not. Emily Raven-Hart and Charles Iredale must die – must die of being themselves – and I, without art, must record their deaths in this, my Case Book. But I shall not make a clinical report of it, in this diary-like book. Just a few facts.
>
> (CM 435)

In this passage, the voice of Davies speaks directly through Hullah, and the writer even comes very close to stepping in the story he himself delivers. The parallel which Hullah draws between the characters of Tolstoy on the one hand and Emily

and Charlie on the other hand, exhibits that he considers them to be characters in a story as well, and that Hullah here speaks as a direct alter ego of Davies. Above all, it again unmasks the artifice of fiction. Of course, a complete crucible of fact and fiction is technically impossible, as the Davies in the story is only an alter ego or a persona of the real Davies. Still, the blurring of fact and fiction, of reality and text, is not to be neglected. What is more, fact and fiction also amalgamate in the figure of Hullah as an alter ego of Davies. Hullah, as a man of science, professes to put down the death of his friends in a very factual manner, while Davies, as an artistic mind, does the other extreme, namely record their demise in a belletristic way.

The second transgression occurs in one of the many conversations between Hugh McWearie and Jonathan Hullah.

> [Hullah:] "Ritual as Charlie and DeCourcy Parry and Darcy Dwyer knew it belongs to the past, I fear."
> [McWearie:] "Balls! All eras of history are an equal distance from eternity."
> "Who said that?"
> "What makes you think I didn't say it just now, out of my own head?"
> "Did you?"
> "I've said it so often I am pretty sure it's my own."
>
> (CM 448)

Dr. Hullah is cagey about McWearie quoting someone else. And indeed he rightly is. McWearie's aphorism really comes from Davies's *Alchemy In The Theatre*.

> Great drama, drama that may reach the alchemical level, must have dimension and its relevance will take care of itself. Writing about AIDS rather than the cocktail set, or possibly the fairy kingdom, will not guarantee importance. […] The old comment that all periods of time are at an equal distance from eternity says much, and pondering on it will lead to alchemical theatre while relevance becomes old hat.
>
> (Kuchling 2002:7)

Through McWearie's appropriation of Davies's words, Davies again assumes the position of a character. McWearie's last answer in the excerpt makes clear that Davies is in fact quoting himself. In a 1973 interview, he says that

> the intellectual growth of mankind is exceedingly slow and […] the difference between us sitting here and a man living six hundred years ago or more is really only a matter of externals. Psychologically he was just like ourselves in a very special and sympathetic way.
>
> (Davis 1989:121)

Because he looks upon evolution as something that is really slower than we all think, it is no shame for writers to indulge in a past form of writing.

The passage is interesting from another point of view as well. Antagonists of Davies might again say that by assuming the form of one of his characters, Davies tries to get across his ideas and indeed forces them upon the reader. Nothing of the sort is true, though. First of all, the writer again divides his philosophy over the different characters of McWearie and Hullah. They may be very good friends, but the conversations between them can become very heated. By splitting the appearance of his alter ego in the novel over two characters, Davies avoids lapsing into authoritative overdrive. He thus again wards off the negative appreciation that was addressed to him because he was supposed to write in an authoritative style.

He also refutes his alleged conservatism. With the aphorism, he defends the use of the tradition, which in most of the cases boils down to the abuse of it as well. Like Francis Cornish in *What's Bred In The Bone*, Davies delights in writing in the classic mode. Francis has already soon set his goals in life: he wants to become a painter. However, he quickly finds out that he cannot express his inner artistic vision in the manner of his day.

> He was inclined to deplore the fact that, strive as he would, he liked the painting of an earlier day better than that of contemporary artists. What was he to make of himself? How could he cope to be an artist, even of the humblest rank, if he did not live and feel in tune with his own time? When the paintings that haunted him were not modern either in technique or in taste?
>
> (WBIB 565)

Indeed, what is bred in the bone will not out of the flesh, as the Middle English proverb goes. Davies is too canny a writer to dismiss the English literary canon, and this is what the argument between McWearie and Hullah purports to. But, just like Francis Cornish's paintings, Davies is not only interested in the tradition for the sake of that tradition alone. Saraceni, Francis's master, says the following on seeing Francis's life work:

> Your picture is by no means an exercise in a past manner; those things always betray a certain want of real energy, and this has plenty of energy, the unmistakable impression of here and now. Something unquestionably from the Mothers. Reality of artistic creation, in fact. You have found a reality that is not part of the chronological present. Your here and now are not of our time. You seem not to be trapped, as most of us are, in the psychological world of today. I hate such philosophical pomposities, but your immanence is not tainted by the calendar.
>
> (WBIB 664)

Francis's work shows an amount of energy which is not to be discerned in paintings which only relish in the past fashion because of nostalgia. His *Marriage at Cana* is a triptych produced in the style of the Old European Masters. The central panel presents the marriage scene with three prominent figures: husband and wife, and the mother of Christ, for she wears a halo. The peripheral figures in the central part are the guests, and one creature that resembles an angel but is too idiotic to represent one. The left wing portrays Jesus Christ and some other biblical figures. The right panel shows some more wedding guests (WBIB 694-696). The painting thus seems to depict a classic European tableau. Even so, careful readers may notice that it is also a representation of Francis Cornish's life and that of his family and friends. Therefore, Francis uses a past mode of painting to use it for his own purpose. The figures that are so central to the European canon are used and at the same time abused because they really impersonate characters that come from peripheral Canada. The energy that Saraceni spots in the picture, then, is the drive of parody. Correspondingly, in *The Cunning Man*, Davies writes back to the canon, by incorporating Canadian characters in a typically European past form of writing, and thus both handles and manipulates the central discourse to give expression to the voice from the attic.

In a nutshell, the transgression of Davies's voice into his story of *The Cunning Man* demonstrates a couple of things. Firstly, the thin line between fact and fiction is asserted once again. The fictionality of the text, however distorted it may be, is not to be cut loose entirely from the reality of the author. The second issue, which is closely related to the first, is that the appearance of Davies's alter ego in the novel is an artifice that serves the writer to speak in metafictional terms on his artistic creation. And thirdly, it is inserted within the whole context of parody and the arming of the minor literature's voice against that of the literary centre. The issue of the minority's speech and culture assuming a position in the centre of tradition will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

chapter five
intertextuality textualized: the parodic caduceus

> But of course the thing that hath been is always presenting itself in new garments, and is always being experienced freshly by new generations, so there is an illusion – a very strong and exciting illusion – of novelty. And that is a good thing, for otherwise we might think that we were all on a treadmill of endless repetition and that life was not worth having.
>
> (Robertson Davies, *The Merry Heart,* p. 354)

In the preceding chapter, the crucible of fact and fiction has been uncovered through an investigation of how *The Cunning Man* inscribes itself in the tradition of the postmodernist metafictional novel. This chapter will further take apart the classic split between factual and fictional writing by showing how the theory of intertextuality, as it has been discussed in chapter three, is strategically and thematically mirrored in the novel. In other words, *The Cunning Man* metafictionally discusses the issue of parodic intertextuality. The combination of a metafictional reading of *The Cunning Man* with a parodical one is not far-fetched, for Linda Hutcheon herself points out that the double-voiced word of parody as "discourse *within* and *about* discourse", as Mikhail Bakhtin defines it, is "not a bad definition of metafiction" (Hutcheon 1985:72).

The first section will scrutinize how Davies translates and rewrites into fiction the parodical dichotomy in Linda Hutcheon's theory of intertextuality. Subsequently, this analysis will look at how the typically postmodernist unresolved split in parody is maintained.

A PAIR OF MASSASSAUGA RATTLERS

> If we are true to the great myth, we can give it what form we choose. The myth—the wax—does not change. […] It will be artistically true, but you mustn't expect it to be literally true because—well, because a literal fidelity to the nineteenth century would be false.
>
> (Robertson Davies, *The Lyre Of Orpheus*, p. 862)

The basic thematic dichotomy in *The Cunning Man* is the one between science and religion. This opposition is already laid out on the first page of the book. When Father Ninian Hobbes drops to the ground on taking the Host on Good Friday, Dr.

Jonathan Hullah speeds to the altar to help the old man, but meets with Charlie's resistance.

> When Charlie waved me back, hissing, "This is holy ground. Leave it to me," I did not want to insist on my rights, or at any rate my privileges, as a medical man. Charlie was insisting on his rights as a priest in a way I resented, but I did not want to get in a tit-for-tat quarrel with him. We were members of two rival priesthoods, he the Man of God and I the Man of Science.
>
> (CM 9-10)

The rivalry between the scientific and the religious sphere runs throughout the novel. The core of the split is already to be found in Hullah's native village, Sioux Lookout.

In Sioux Lookout, science is impersonated by the character of Dr. Ogg, the local physician and the only scientist around in miles. Science is his religion:

> But keep this clearly before you, Jon. […] Science rules the world. Cling to Science, boy, and keep clear of superstition. And there's lots of that. Did you ever hear of Christian Science? That's a what d'ye call 'em – an oxymoron, and don't you ever get to be that kind of moron.
>
> (CM 48)

In the village of Sioux Lookout, Ogg's competitor is Père Lartigue. "Science, Jon; science rules the world. Take Père Lartigue, for instance. Not a bad fella, for a Frog, but what's he got to give the people here? Magic. That's what he does in his church" (CM 45).

So, there seems to be a clear black-and-white division between the two epistemic paradigms. Science is the way to tangible knowledge; religion paves the path to volatile superstition. At the same time, however, the opposition is distorted. Davies makes both Dr. Ogg and Père Lartigue into laughable characters. Young though Hullah still is in the village of his birth, he clearly recognizes that the dichotomy between the scientific and the religious does not hold firmly. He takes critical distance from Doc Ogg: "[he] was not an ornament of the medical profession, and he was rarely called to our house except in extreme emergencies. Dr. Ogg was a drunk and a failure" (CM 26). Moreover, he is a bootlegger at the time when Canada is under the yoke of the Prohibition and Temperance Act, which makes him into a criminal as well. Also in his profession he is incompetent: he concocts totally ineffective tonics and takes a wildly unscientific attitude towards the very common venereal diseases. Though he brags about his training at university, he graduated near the bottom of his class, without any distinctions or

awards, and never added anything to the knowledge he gathered at university. His certificate from the University of Toronto "hung, always crooked, on his office wall; it was signed by a number of indecipherable names, but Doc could identify them all, and invariably spoke of them with familiar affection as "Old So-and-So" from whom he had learned the science which meant so much to him" (CM 48). His opponent, Père Lartigue, likewise is a failure. He dreadfully suffers from haemorrhoids.

> But he could not appeal to Doc Ogg because Doc Ogg would have demanded that he hike up his *soutane*, and let down his pants, and show the afflicted part; Père Lartigue's Jansenist modesty could not endure such an exposure. So every Saturday night old Annie, his housekeeper and the source of all rectory gossip, called on Mrs. Smoke for a jar of fresh butter in which boiled yarrow had been generously mixed, for the priestly anointing.
>
> (CM 38)

So, Davies's humour eventually unmasks and breaks down the opposition between science and religion, between the natural and the supernatural, or between genuine and counterfeit.

The opposition is also subverted through the character of Elsie Smoke. Smoke is the "wise woman" (CM 28) of the native town of Dr. Hullah, and belongs to the indigenous Métis and Ojibway community. She resides in a hut in which she mixes the medicine for her tribe. Understandably, she is mercilessly condemned by Doc Ogg. When Hullah as a child gets scarlet fever and seems to be running into an early death, Ogg tries to get her away from the sick Hullah.

> "Damned interfering old slut," he said, with a very red face. "Her and her shaking tent and her damn-fool rubbish! I'd have her run out of this place if she wasn't on the reserve and a little bit outside the law. She just keeps up superstition and gets in the way of the advance of science."
>
> (CM 30)

So, Ogg associates Smoke with superstition and aligns her with Père Lartigue, who also is on the dark, magic side. At the same time, however, it is Elsie Smoke who eventually cures Jonathan Hullah from scarlet fever by sending for the Indians. These "Helpers" set up a Shaking Tent, which is an icon and a ritual that has been found among others in the Ojibway tradition and that provokes healing powers. By calling up the spirits through music, dance and prayer, the Ojibwa heal their sick. For Ogg, this is obviously all superstition and magic, but his vocabulary reveals a lot. By calling what Smoke and the Indians do "superstition" and "magic", he lays bare that what they do belongs to another epistemological paradigm which he cannot grasp. In the words of Elsie Smoke: "magic is shit" (CM 130). For her,

‘magic’ is not a positive term. Obviously, she does not mean to say that the denotation of the word, i.e. her medical practice, is shit. On the contrary, the negative connotation of ‘magic’ signals Ogg’s attempt to exercise power over Smoke and partakes in what Michel Foucault calls the power of language. In addition, in using language to condemn the ritual episteme of the Other, Ogg wards off his own realm of what he calls knowledge and science against the intrusion of other practices which may be equally valid. After all, he fails to cure Hullah, but does not recognize this. This being so, the Ojibway Shaking Tent and Smoke’s potions can be called ‘science’ as well; not in the restricted sense of ‘knowledge of the Western world’, but as a worthy way of looking at the world, even if it includes the evocation of the supernatural.

What is more, Smoke is called “a wise woman”, which refers to the shamanistic element of Indian episteme, and also the Shaking Tent includes the presence of the shaman. And it is precisely this shaman who combines the earthly with the spiritual, as he or she is both the priest and the doctor of the indigenous community.

> The shaman is a specialist in mysticism, magic and religion who masters the techniques of ecstasy to cure himself and others. [… He is] a sincere predecessor of the medical doctor; furthermore the shaman is to be commended for shielding his patient from harm and for believing strongly in the psychic component of disease.
>
> (Blinderman 1985:44)

In this way, the distinction between science and religion is again blurred.

The strife resurfaces at one of the meetings of the Curfew Club. At this gathering, Davies reintroduces one of his characters of *The Deptford Trilogy*, namely Dunstan Ramsay. Ramsay is a scholar who inquires into hagiography, which is that branch of historical writing which resides on the verges between science and imagination. In his survey, he is interrupted by Evans, a fervent scientist on the board of the Club, who finds himself in disagreement with the unscientific character of the whole saint business. When Charlie gets into the argument, the discussion becomes very heated. He posits the relativity of knowledge and the impossibility for human beings to have any final knowledge at all: “We have to put up with the knowledge that’s open to us during our lifetimes. We can’t have knowledge of future things; we have only a scrappy knowledge of past things” (CM 78). He also points to the mutability and temporariness of human episteme. Meaning constantly shifts. On the present reception of miracles, Ramsay says: “When we speak of a miracle nowadays we tend to think of it as happening in a hospital, or a scientific

lab, where somebody does something that extends or contradicts what had been believed before" (CM 79). Evans reacts by saying that these scientific miracles are always grounded on objective facts and "will stand examination for years after – examination and rigorous testing" (CM 79). Charlie obviously does not agree and adduces that scientific discoveries "will stand examination till the next scientific miracle shows that it was mistaken, or reaches beyond it" (CM 79). For Charlie, the relation between signifier and signified is not stable, but dispersive. Knowledge is, and will always be, unreliable and therefore subjected to rewriting.

Charlie's aversion to knowledge/science goes hand in hand with his inability to cope with authority. His grades in school are bad: he never seems to be able to shift the wheat from the chaff at examinations, and he is virtually a failure in the exact sciences: "Charlie was a failure, because he never seemed to do anything to the satisfaction of authority" (CM 73). Also at the Curfew Club he opposes the will of his superiors. On the evening of Dunstan Ramsay's visit, he does not only thwart the scientific ardour of Evans, but he treads on the toes of the Club's board as well. Charlie is only an attendant, not a member, so the Club's seniors find it very surprising and even offensive that he dares to speak up.

> "Well done, Iredale; you've got 'em on the run," said Mr. Ramsay laughing; he was enjoying himself. This may not have been the happiest moment, because, although it seemed to cover Charlie with laurels, it widened the gap between him and the anointed members of the Curfew Club; toward them his talk came dangerously close to being cheek because at that time, in that school, there was an almost Japanese respect for seniority.
>
> (CM 82)

The thematic opposition between science and religion, between the phenomenal and the noumenal, between the knowable and the unknowable, is inscribed in Davies's long occupation with the relation between body and soul. Patricia Monk traces the theme back to Davies's *The Salterton Trilogy* (1986:79), which covers his first three novels. The psychosomatic entity, for Davies, is not to be split in half: "Body and mind are a unity, and who dares deny that the entelechy, or the vegetative intelligence, or whatever you choose to call the wisdom of the body, has no influence on the mental capacities or the moral outlook?" (quoted in Monk 1986:80). I am very aware of the fact that in the excerpt, Davies speaks of body and mind, and not of body and soul. However, both Davies and Monk seem not to distinguish between spirit, soul and mind and use the three terms to denote the inward spiritual faculty, as opposed to the exterior and tangible set of relations with respect to knowledge and body. The text of *The Cunning Man* confirms this: "mind

in the largest definition and not just the calculator inside your head" (CM 272). Hullah shares this thought in his medical perspective:

> Was I an apostle of health, and if so what was health? If it was bodily well-being, that was a reasonable if not a simple answer. But if it included mental well-being, or spiritual well-being, the whole thing became greatly complicated.
>
> (CM 245)

In Davies's philosophical vocabulary, then, 'mind' primarily refers to a spiritual concept and resides more on the side of what Kant called 'reason' or the noumenal world, than on the side of Kantian 'understanding' or the phenomenal world.

In *The Cunning Man*, the psychosomatic division is, just like the opposition between science and religion, corrupted. The medicine which Dr. Jonathan Hullah employs is of a rather unorthodox nature. He professes to be a doctor-humanist. In his *Anatomy of Fiction*, a scientific work by an M.D. on the most notable characters of fiction, he blends fact and fiction. Next to that, he also intermingles the spheres of body and soul in his medical practice. In the interview with Esme, he points out that a physician does not necessarily need to deal with the body alone.

> "How did you know that he was dead?"
> "Long experience. In war, as a police surgeon – you get to know the look. Something has gone."
> "How would you define that?"
> "Just in those words. The soul has gone."
> "The soul?"
> "You seem surprised."
> "I am. You, a doctor, talking about the soul."
>
> (CM 12-13)

Esme, as the epitome of objectivity through her affiliation with journalism, does not seem to understand that science is not exempted from the psychic world. The distortion is not unidirectional, however. The psyche/mind does not solely invade the phenomenal realm; the body crosses the border as well:

> I was not a convinced believer in anything the enthusiasts for psychosomatic medicine have to say, though I was an intent listener. Of course the mind influences the body; but the body influences the mind, as well, and to take only one side in the argument is to miss much that is – in the true sense of the word – vital.
>
> (CM 331)

Hullah takes up an interactive healing model of body and mind, or after Oscar Wilde in his *Picture of Dorian Gray*, he "cure[s] the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul" (Wilde 1992:146). So, through the figure of the doctor-humanist Hullah, the division between body and soul becomes a crucible, and the world is seen through a psychosomatic as well as somatopsychic perspective.

Another significant dualistic translation of the dichotomy science vs. religion or body vs. soul is the conflict between knowledge and wisdom. The classic split between knowledge, soma and science on the one hand and wisdom, psyche and religion on the other hand is again questioned. In Hullah's/Davies's philosophy, knowledge and wisdom are distinct, but one cannot do away with either of them.

> Knowledge and Wisdom and they are not the same, because Knowledge is what you are taught, but Wisdom is what you bring to it. Here's Jon, he's right in the middle of it at this moment. He's being taught, and what is he being taught? Science, of course. Very fine, very splendid, very indisputable until somebody comes along with a new notion that squelches the old one. But he is also bringing to it the other snake, and we'll call it Humanism, though that doesn't rule out the gods.
>
> (CM 167)

Mankind needs both knowledge and wisdom. To reside either in the realm of knowledge or in the realm of wisdom is fatal. Doc Ogg is a failure, and so is Charlie eventually. He listens to the voice of the supernatural alone and kills Father Hobbes, which in the end brings him down.

The notions of knowledge and wisdom have a special significance to Hullah. As a physician, he is a representative of the scientific branch. In medical school, he has to cram a lot of facts, but he soon realizes that knowledge as a collection of bits of data will not quench his thirst. In the Second World War, in which Hullah participates as an army doctor, his hotel in London is bombed by the Germans during the Blitz. As he is just taking a bath and the ceiling comes down, he is trapped for rather more than four days in a tub filled with icy and dirty water and plaster from the ceiling. On the second day, he is even deprived of drinking water, as he cannot suppress a bowel movement, and cannot force himself to drink of the "cold faecal soup" (CM 218). It is in this awkward situation that Hullah tests his knowledge of the human body. He knows that a healthy human being can survive for a while without food, but not without water. He also realizes that the cold may play tricks on him. After running through a check-list of medical data on his painful condition, he recognizes that science will not offer him the solution. Therefore, he

tries to gain strength by means of his spirit. He recalls the image of Smoke's totem animal (see infra) to help him get through his ordeal. In his memoir, he looks back to this event, and he sees that it was his spiritual drive and his call upon the supernatural that kept him going.

> But I had what I must call a revelation in that tub and very slowly I came to some conclusions that have been important in shaping my life ever since.
> As I look back at what I have written, I ask myself if I am being quite honest? Did I receive no help from anything greater than the hope that the workers outside would find me? Did I not, when the patch of sky that I could see above me turned black, think of Mrs. Smoke and her helpers?
>
> (CM 221)

On the verge of giving in to fatality, Hullah understands that knowledge alone cannot possibly satisfy him.

In his bathtub individuation, Hullah sees confirmed his previous medical practice in the battlefield. It is precisely in the actuality of war that he sees that there is much more to the patient than the soma alone. He appeals to the psyche as well: "I became the Talking Doctor, and anyone who thinks that talking under such circumstances is easy work should try it and find out the reality" (CM 216). After the incident at the bombed hotel, he continues this philosophy. He uses his interactive model of body and spirit or knowledge and wisdom in his confrontation after the War with shell-shocked and mutilated soldiers:

> I talked, of course. […] Indeed, this was sensitive work. But already I knew enough about my job to know that I was doing something just by listening and accepting whatever role the rage of these men imposed on me. I was the stupid artillery.
>
> (CM 222-223)

The uniqueness and unusual character of Hullah's medical practice during and after battle resides in the fact that he treats his patients both bodily and spiritually, through both knowledge and wisdom.

The theme of knowledge and wisdom is also adduced at the staging of Goethe's *Faust* by The Players' Guild. The company is one of Toronto's most famous theatre groups at the time of Hullah's education at university. At the rehearsals, Mervyn Rentoul, who acts the role of Dr. Faust, feels overshadowed by the massive presence of Mephistopheles, and requests that he get some kind of impressive appurtenance so as not to be topped completely by the devil. He suggests that he is given a stick, to symbolize his persona as a magician, next to his character as a

scholar. Jock, teacher of German at Colborne College, suggests he uses the herald's wand of Hermes.

> The veritable caduceus of Hermes, with serpents twining round it. […] Listen – it's thousands of years old, and it comes from the days when gods trod the earth. Once when Hermes walked abroad he came on two snakes fighting furiously. To make peace and establish balance, or reconciliation or whatever, he thrust his staff between the snakes and they crawled up it, still hissing, but this time in concord, and they have remained twined about the staff of the healer to this day. And what are the snakes? You could call them Knowledge and Wisdom.
>
> (CM 166)

So, the caduceus is a symbol of keeping balance. It represents the ability to possess and control knowledge and wisdom. *In casu*, it pairs up science with a dash of common sense.

The theme of knowledge and wisdom is also prominent in the original Faustian material. Faust values the former over the latter and is eventually brought down by it. His descent is caused by the Faustian bargain. His inability to reach the epiphany of wisdom is exhibited by the selling of his soul to Mephistopheles. Finally, his lack of both wisdom and soul corresponds to his *hubris*. Instead of staying under the confinements of human existence and necessity, he makes a deal with the devil. Faustus is after all punished for his exertion of the sin of pride when he is driven through the gates of hell. Necessity must finally take its course. This being so, the intertextual reference to *Faust* through its performance by The Players' Guild is not coincidental. *Faust* and *The Cunning Man* display a high thematic convergence.

Hullah's concern with the theme of knowledge and wisdom does not emerge out of his experience in the war, nor does it originate in The Players' Guild's habitat; it is only confirmed there. Actually, his occupation with it stems from his childhood in Sioux Lookout. After his recovery from scarlet fever, he frequently visits Elsie Smoke, whom he considers as the one who rescued him. However, the question haunts him ever since he has been cured. Smoke, upon being confronted with Hullah's quest for the truth about his mysterious healing, denies having a finger in the curative pie and asks young Hullah which is his totem animal. When Hullah is unable to answer her question, she takes out of her basket one of the two Massassauga rattlers and holds it before him. Of course he startles and, as he grows older, he repeatedly refers to the snakes which left such a deep impression on him. Smoke introduces the rattlers to Hullah as his totem animal: "your animal that goes with you and helps you" (CM 42). Moreover, "you don't choose him. He chooses you" (CM 42). This strongly reminds us of the figure of the *daimon*, which

Davies also used in *What's Bred In The Bone* in the character of Maimas, who is Francis Cornish's demon.

The three pairs of snakes – the caduceus of Hermes, the staff of Faust and the rattlers of Smoke – significantly convolute in Hullah's main step forward towards individuation, namely in the bathtub incident.

> I thought of my totem, as Mrs. Smoke had shown it to me. But my intertwining snakes had not then assumed the strength in my psychological makeup that they were to attain later, and they did nothing for me. I thought of *Faust*, which was still fresh in my memory, but it had nothing to suggest except the inevitability of Fate, and when one's thread of life seems about to be clipped by the shears of unblinking Atropos, it demands a sturdier mind than mine to face it with courage.
>
> (CM 219)

The intertwinement of classical Greek mythology, Romantic German literature and Native American ritual suggests that the three have more in common than is usually assumed. Davies also refuses to associate myth only with classical myth, and uses the word in a broader sense: "This is a word which in a way I mistrust because when I talk about myth I really mean patterns, archetypes, and very often when people talk about myths they only mean classic myths" (Davis 1989:50). In the interview, he goes on to say that myth for him is more general, and that it includes classical mythology as well as northern fairy tales. By extending the semantics of the word 'myth', he makes clear that classical myth is not the only way of looking at life through a fictional lens, and that every culture makes its own interpretation of patterns and archetypes.

> It is in this curious fairy tale world, the world of the northern forests rather than in the Greek or the Hebrew, which don't seem to me to be tied in with our way of feeling as intimately. [...] On this continent it is really quite different, and the application of Greek myths to modern North America sometimes has to be stretched very far.
>
> (Davis 1989:50)

So, what Davies again is doing here is applying the force of parody. He uses canonical texts and subverts them by applying them to another epistemological paradigm, i.e. that of the Native North Americans. In this way, he equates classical Greek with Native American myth and valorizes them as two relevant ways of looking at life, but only within the respective cultures. He takes the traditional symbol of the Hermetic caduceus out of the Greek tradition, and incorporates it, through the staging of Goethe's *Faust*, into the indigenous North American body of

texts. The Greek snakes are parodied in the image of the shaman's Massassauga rattlers.

Davies adds to the palimpsest of the serpents one more layer when Hullah decorates his clinic. To remind himself never to be pleased only with the scientific explanation, and in order to remember his position as a mortal being and therefore as a subject to Necessity, he asks Emily Raven-Hart to make a representation of Hermes' warring serpents. He gives her carte blanche about the actual filling-in of the piece of art, so "she can really do something in the modern manner" (CM 304). Eventually, it turns out that instead of the snakes of Hermes, Emily crafts another pair.

> "This caduceus – Hermes' walking-stick with two snakes curling around it – Mervyn Rentoul had one of those things made when he played Faust, do you remember? The magician's wand. Well, it'll be a nice classical touch in your reception room."
> "Not entirely classical. I've asked Emily to give it a genuine Canadian treatment. The snakes will be a pair of Massassauga rattlers."
>
> (CM 306)

So, the serpents shed their skin in order to give a voice to both the Natives and the Canadians, and in this way, Davies's *The Cunning Man*, as a postcolonial text, writes back to the canon.

The snakes of knowledge and wisdom are not only parodied to serve the postcolonial text, they also have an additional significance in the context of postmodernism. Whenever the caduceus is mentioned, it is stressed that the snakes never really stop fighting. The thrusting of the staff only brings balance and the snakes are still in motion:

> To make peace and establish balance, or reconciliation, or whatever, he thrust his staff between the snakes and they crawled up it, still hissing, but this time in concord, and they have remained twined about the staff of the healer to this day.
>
> (CM 166)
>
> When Emily is finished I shall have on my wall a constant reminder of the Warring Serpents of Hermes – Knowledge and Wisdom, balanced in eternal tension.
>
> (CM 306)

The eternal struggle of the snakes drops a hint at postmodernist literary theory about intertextuality. It is in fact almost literally mirrored in Hutcheon's discourse on parody: "postmodernism's irony is one that rejects the resolving urge of modernism towards closure" (1989:95). "In postmodern parody, the doubleness of

the politics of authorized transgression remains intact: there is no dialectic resolution or recuperative evasion of contradiction in narrative fiction" (Hutcheon 1989:102). For Hutcheon, parodical use and abuse counterbalance each other, but they are never reconcilable. They never aim at closing the gap. Postmodernist intertextual writing does not simply revert to the tradition out of nostalgia: it is always critical. And it is precisely this critical stance which reminds us of the quarrelling snakes. So, the Massassauga rattlers are used both to the advantage of the postcolonial text and as mirroring elements of postmodernist literary theory. The use of past texts presupposes knowledge of the canon, while abuse requires a dash of common sense, or irony. Knowledge is what you read or the act of reading itself, wisdom determines how you read it or the act of criticism. And to keep open and foreground the critical distance between knowledge and wisdom or use and abuse, the staff is required. The postmodernist quill keeps quotation and subversion in a beautiful and paradoxical unison of separation.

When use of the tradition is seen in the light of knowledge, it is significant to reconsider Charlie's opposition against authority. As a priest, he resides in the realm of wisdom as opposed to that of knowledge. Knowledge of the literary tradition implies having an acquaintance with one's literary forebears. Charlie's resistance to authority, then, signifies his lack of knowledge or repression of the literary canon and the eviction of authors. For him, only his experience counts. His claiming of the right to experience explains his dismissal of author-ity, both in the sense of superiors that need to be obeyed as in the meaning of the literary heritage.

The Massassauga rattlers fight a never-ending war. *Mutatis mutandis*, the literary work, or literature as a whole, is never finished. Bakhtin's dialogism implies that the space between the text and the reader will always be taken up, and that the intermediary space will in its turn function as a text which will and must be criticized and rewritten. There will always be rewriting and intertextuality, because the system of intertextuality feeds itself. As will be explained in the next chapter, this concept is particularly relevant for psychoanalytic literary criticism.

So, the theory of intertextual parody as formulated by Linda Hutcheon is mirrored in *The Cunning Man* through the themes of knowledge and wisdom. Or, Davies's novel takes as intertext the postmodernist theory of intertextuality. Again, this is an instance of the metafictional power of this novel. It comments upon its own fictionality, and in doing so, it blurs fact and fiction.

Another metafictional comment on the doubleness of parody is to be found in the overt intertextual reference to Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* The title of the Latin

writer's volume can be interpreted in this way that literature is always in a flux of permutation. But there is more. At the end of *The Cunning Man*, Hullah summarily unfolds his life philosophy to Esme. In doing this, he points to the *Metamorphoses* and its context of the Greek Perennial Philosophy. The Perennial Philosophy is a concept that was taken down by Plato and that joined Herakleitos' *panta rhei* with Pythagoras. If everything flows, literature does so too. And it is in this respect that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is significant. Davies includes rather a long quote from the elaborate poem in *The Cunning Man*, and he also draws upon the material in *The Lyre of Orpheus* (1988, see epigraph to this section), so he must deem the intertext to be of considerable relevance to his argument.

Then Death, so call'd, is but old Matter dress'd
In some new Figure, and a vary'd Vest:
Thus all Things are but alter'd, nothing dies;
And here and there th' unbodied Spirit flies,
By Time, or Force, or Sickness dispossest,
And lodges, where it lights, in Man or Beast;
Or huts without, till ready Limbs it finds
And actuates those according to their kind;
From Tenement to Tenement is toss'd;
The Soul is still the same, the Figure only lost;
And, as the soften'd Wax new Seals receives,
This Face assumes, and that impression leaves;
Now call'd by one, now by another Name;
The Form is only chang'd, the Wax is still the same:
So Death, so call'd, can but the Form deface,
Th' immortal Soul flies out in empty space;
To seek her Fortune in some other Place.
(CM 466-467)

Ovid's wax and seal are yet another translation of the principle of parodic use and abuse. For Davies, it is an important intertext because he has rather annoyingly been associated with conservative writing, and in this instance he defends himself against unwary critics. Rather than write in the classic mode, he proves to put his Canadian seal to the wax of tradition.

In a nutshell, a whole set of binaries can be drawn in *The Cunning Man*. The theme of knowledge and wisdom is reflected in the oppositions science vs. religion, soma vs. psyche, knowledge vs. wisdom, fact vs. fiction, use vs. abuse, authority vs. experience and text vs. reader. The final section of this chapter deals with how and by whom these splits are sustained.

TRICKSTER MAKES THIS WORLD, AS WELL AS THE OTHER ONE

> An amateur astrologer told me last night that I am overly critical, and should try to develop more benevolence toward mankind. Today, therefore, I went about beaming benevolently on everyone I met, and was greeted with scowls and rebuffs by most of them. The plain fact is that most Canadians dislike and mistrust any great show of cheerfulness […] he who laughs is lost.
>
> (Robertson Davies, *The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks*, p. 6-7)

> Angry man of Canada? Angry? I was born when Mercury was in the highest ascendant, that makes me very frivolous.
>
> (J. Madison Davis, *Conversations with Robertson Davies*, p. 7)

> Trickster is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox.
>
> (Lewis Hyde, *Trickster makes this world*, p. 7)

If Davies rewrites the classical Greek caduceus of knowledge and wisdom via the Faustian staff into the snakes of a Native shaman, and consequently into the medical perspective of a Canadian doctor, he also transforms the characters that possess the respective shedding serpents. The figure of Hermes then successively metamorphoses to the medieval alchemist Faust, to the North American medicine woman Elsie Smoke and to the contemporary Canadian physician Jonathan Hullah. The metaphor is even further extended in order to accommodate the status of the postmodernist writer. Because Hermes serves as the basis for the process of rewriting or for the parodic metaphor, it is well worth looking into his nature and mythological background.

Hermes appears in such various guises that it is perhaps easier to define him in terms of what he is not, than in terms of what he is. He is most likely best known as the messenger of the Greek gods and as the guide of human souls to the underworld (psychopompos). However, the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, which is the myth that captures his birth and his essence, does not describe him primarily as divine messenger and psychopompos. The *Hymn* above all puts him in the category of the trickster figure.

In the hymn, Homer pits Hermes against the earlier and more established god Apollo. The two gods show some similarities. They both are patrons of music and literature, and drivers of cattle. However, according to the hymn, Hermes is unlike Apollo, because he is "devious, winning in his cleverness, a robber, […] a spy in the night" (Morford and Lenardon 1985:179). It is precisely from Apollo that Hermes steals his herd. He covers up his mischief by having the stolen heifers walk backwards, so that it will not be found out which direction the animals have taken. Eventually, though, the trickery is unmasked and Zeus commands Hermes to return the herd. As an act of reconciliation, Hermes crafts a lyre out of a tortoise and gives

it to Apollo. In exchange, he is bestowed with the celestial herd and is also given a golden wand, which is a prototype of the caduceus. As a result of the confrontation, an alliance is forged between Apollo and Hermes (Hamlyn 1963:51).

So, Hermes resembles Apollo in his patronage of herdsman and cattle, but this honour is ascribed to him exactly because he has stolen it from Apollo. In this way, he questions the incontestability of Apollo's hegemony and makes a grand appearance on the stage. In other words, he affirms his existence by exerting his trickery and cunning on a central god, and thus moves from the periphery to the centre.

Hermes' disruption and reordering of the divine hierarchy displays his ability to bring about change in the world. Hermes is a trickster, and the trickster is an archetype of transformation. The noted anthropologist Paul Radin, who wrote the standard work on the trickster in Native American mythology, says that "trickster myths in North America give an account of the creation of the earth, or at least the transforming of the world, and have a hero who is always wandering" (1972:155). Allan Ryan claims that the trickster archetype should be understood in terms of " 'doing' rather than [...] 'being' " (1999:5). Also the Canadian author Robert Kroetsch, who puts the North American trickster Coyote centre-stage (Monkman 1981:156), emphasizes in his writing the process instead of the product. Or, in the terminology of Roland Barthes, instead of readerly texts, he makes writerly texts. The result of the transformative power of the trickster figure is that closed systems are always disentangled and that discourses are undecided rather than revealing a final truth.

The precondition for transformation is the existence of opposites. In Carl Gustav Jung's psychology, polarity is of paramount importance: "There is no position without its negation. In spite or just because of their extreme opposition, neither can exist without the other" (1972:43). The task of man is to constantly confront his opposite. For this, Jung borrowed from Herakleitos the term *enantiodromia*, which means 'to run counter to' (Rosen 1998:225). Significantly, Jonathan Hullah's medical view traces back to Plato's Perennial Philosophy, which is in its turn a rewriting of Herakleitos' *panta rhei.* The latter concept denotes the possibility of everything turning into its opposite: "These were the two sides of a coin, the Ying and the Yang, the opposites which Heraclitus insists are eternally flowing together and balancing one another" (CM 153). If a human being does not acknowledge and face his shadow, he or she will be brought down by it. Only when the human mind confronts the Other self-consciously, it opens the door to individuation. The process of individuation, according to Jung, includes the opposition to, confrontation with

and integration of one’s opposite: “Owning goes beyond recognition; it goes beyond the acceptance of the shadow to a full comprehension of what the self is and can become and it includes a decision to act upon such knowledge” (Lundquist 1991:26). When the shadow is assimilated, the human psyche will live in eternal oppositional tension, just like the Hermetic snakes represented in the caduceus: “The unity of our psychic nature lies in the middle” (Jung 1972:149).

Already in his very early writings, Davies was concerned with the archetype of the shadow. The paradoxical relationship between ego and shadow is most interestingly displayed in Davies’s satirical column which he wrote for the *Peterborough Examiner* and which was later published as *The Diary of Samuel Marchbanks. The Diary* is the reflection of Marchbanks’s daily struggles with his unwilling furnace, with the wilderness of his garden and with his tax-evasive tendencies. Davies pits against Marchbanks a fictionalized version of himself, namely the Davies that edits the Marchbanks material in order to make it accessible to the modern-day reader:

> I would iron out all the difficulties, correct any errors of fact that might have crept into the original versions, explain the significance of any names that might be unfamiliar to modern readers, and generally act as a gentle headwaiter to Marchbanks’ splendid banquet.
>
> (Marchbanks VI)

But, Davies soon finds out that Marchbanks is not an easy companion. In the introduction to *The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks*, which comprises *The Diary* and other Marchbanks material which was written later on, Davies engages Marchbanks in conversation. Significantly, they meet at one of Marchbanks’s favourite ports of call, “a tavern called The Crank and Schizoid, close by the Clarke Insititute of Psychiatry in the city of Toronto” (Marchbanks VIII). During the chat, Marchbanks states that they are like *The Corsican Brothers,* an old Victorian melodrama.

> The brothers are united by a psychic bond, in spite of superficial differences of character. When one of them is kicked by an enemy, the other is unable to sit down for several days: if the other is attracted by a woman, the first is moved – he knows not why – to send her a bouquet of flowers. You and I are like that, Davies. We are *The Canadian Brothers.* You, the academic, pussyfooting brother and I the dashing, romantic brother. It is as simple as that.
>
> (Marchbanks IX)

Davies, the academic, recognizes the typical connection and proposes that, in Jungian terms, he is the real man and Marchbanks is his shadow. Marchbanks

obviously spurns the controlled and academic nature of Davies, laughs his remark away and says: “For you to suggest that I am *your* Shadow – therein scholarly impertinence has surely found its masterpiece” (Marchbanks X). They finally agree upon comparing themselves to the two sides of a coin.

Though Marchbanks dismisses Davies’s Jungian vocabulary, he clearly is Davies’s shadow figure. Patricia Monk recognizes in Marchbanks the natural exuberance of Davies which he has to keep down because of his serious occupation in the newspaper business (1982:39). Whereas Davies writes carefully and approaches writing as a delicate craft, “Marchbanks is an impetuous and inveterately inaccurate writer”, who uses “slapdash references and half-baked assumptions” and who “writes at full speed, never pausing for reflection or using one word when he can think of two” (Marchbanks VII). Marchbanks, then, embodies

> the qualities which both outrage us and attract us. They outrage us because they violate our system of social interaction as a human group: Samuel Marchbanks does not conform to convention; he breaks the agreed rules of acceptable behaviour. But at the same time these qualities attract us because they are qualities which we as individual human beings share with him: they appeal to the ‘savage’ in each of us which has had to be suppressed in the process of learning the rules and conforming to group standards. But however thoroughly the savage is suppressed, he can never be entirely eliminated from our psyche, and his reappearance is always possible if convention breaks down.
>
> (Monk 1982:36)

In the *Papers*, then, Davies actively engages the confrontation with his own fictionalized shadow Samuel Marchbanks. Though this does not lead to individuation, because, as Patricia Monk remarks, Marchbanks is the creative dimension of Davies’s shadow instead of his real personal shadow (Monk 1982:37-38), the shadow is still taken into account rather than dismissed. This results in the beautiful symbiosis of the *Papers*, in which the shadow figure of Davies takes up a central position and forces Davies towards the margins of the text, and in which Davies at once admires Marchbanks and scorns him through the ironical innuendo of his editing pen.

Marchbanks is the literary expression of Davies’s individual shadow. The trickster is, according to Jungian psychology, a collective shadow figure. It is “a summation of all the inferior traits of character in individuals” (Jung 1972:150). Precisely because of his universal nature, he appears in collective fantasy, that is to say, in myths and fairytales. As the collective shadow figure is expressed in stories,

human beings learn to recognize him and can then meet their individual shadow: "As in its collective, mythological form, so also the individual shadow contains within it the seed of an *enantiodromia*, of a conversion into its opposite" (Jung 1972:152). So, the trickster is a collective figure which has the individual face his own shadow.

In *The Cunning Man*, the shadow is omnipresent, and needs to be met with. The smothering presence of the shadow is spotlighted in the novel through the staging of Goethe's *Faust*: "[Mervyn Rentoul] was to play the great Dr. Faust, and, like every actor of that part, he faced the formidable task of topping his Mephistopheles. […] How many Fausts can outshine even a decent Mephistopheles?" (CM 165-166). In the evaluation of the play, Mervyn Rentoul proves not to have been able to overpower his shadow: "Poor Mervyn Rentoul was brushed aside by the critics as having been 'wooden'; they did not know how hard it is not to be wooden when onstage with Darcy Dwyer, who won all the notices as Mephistopheles" (CM 190).

Trickster makes the psyche recognize the individual shadow as the key to individuation. The medical practice of Dr. Jonathan Hullah is very much alike the trickster principle. During the war, Hullah gets to be known as the Talking Doctor. Through his talk, he tries to have the patient talk himself. The doctor only incites his patients to unearth what they in fact already know themselves. So, he confronts them with their own worries instead of solving them himself. Rather than playing the magician, Hullah has his patients meet their own shadow, *in casu* their disease. For instance, when Hugh McWearie consults Cunning Man Hullah about his wheezes, Hullah tactfully explains to him that his filthy pipes are responsible. However, he also tells him that if he gives up smoking, his body may enjoy an improved health, but he may not live better in spiritual or in mental terms. McWearie, who is obviously as one of Davies's most favourite characters an intelligent man, gets the picture and thanks his doctor.

> "I follow you, Doctor," said he. "As the old music hall song puts it–'A little o' what you fancy does you good'–but moderation must be observed. The Golden Mean, a dash of wisely applied Platonism, and a light self-discipline. I take your meaning and I thank you for not threatening me. You have reminded me of what I ought to have known myself, great gowk that I am. But one must visit a wise man from time to time to discover what one already knows."
>
> (CM 245)

The trickster possesses the wisdom to make the human psyche recognize its individual shadow because he himself has internalized his shadow. He expresses the polar structure of the psyche. He "accounts for the twinness in humans" (Lundquist 1991:25). Trickster is always characterized in terms of 'both … and …'. Paul Radin points to the ambiguity or paradoxical nature of the trickster:

> In what must be regarded as its earliest and most archaic form, as found among the North American Indians, Trickster is at one and the same time, creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself.
>
> (Radin 1972:xxiii)

Also Patricia Monk spots that in the Marchbanks material, Marchbanks's humour is often turned on himself (1982:31).

Another instance of the ambiguity of the collective shadow figure is the unison of good and evil in his nature. In the archetype of the trickster, good and evil are inextricably linked. This also applies to the philosophical perspective of Native tribes.

> These people had been taught by the Black Robes that good and evil existed as separate things. We talked with them about this philosophy and discovered their confusion. They had these two things set apart. But they are not separate. These things are found in the same Forked Tree.
>
> (Lundquist 1991:32)

The ambivalence of evil is a theme which Davies already explored in *The Deptford Trilogy* (Lucking 2000:44-56). Basically, he believes that you cannot have good without evil. In this way, he opposes orthodox Christianity which sets the two fundamentally apart. Consequently, Davies thinks of the Fall of man from Eden as a positive story, and finds in it a corroboration of the fact that good can only come about through evil. He stresses the important role which the shadow plays in the Fall from paradise. Davies's affinity with Jung is again not to be overlooked. Also for Jung, "the legend of the fall […] is the expression of a dim presentiment that the emancipation of ego-consciousness was a Luciferian deed" (1972:108). It is the confrontation with the shadow that makes individuation possible. Likewise, in *The Deptford Trilogy*, the narrative takes off with an act of malice when Percy Staunton throws a snowball containing a stone at Dunstan Ramsay. The snowball mistakenly hits the pregnant Mary Dempster who in consequence gives premature birth to Paul Dempster. Obviously, the untimely ripping from the womb is a minor allegory of the Fall. In the end, Paul becomes the celebrated conjuror and trickster Magnus

Eisengrim, and he recognizes that his status as a fully individuated person and his success as a magician were bred in the snowball incident.

In *The Cunning Man*, Davies still employs this moral perspective. At the staging of *Faust,* Mephistopheles spits in the scholar's book of knowledge: "And when the student takes it reverently, and reads it, it says: *Eritis sicut Deus, scientes bonum et malum.* The Satanic spew, it appears, spells out the serpent's words to Eve: *Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil*" (CM 190). Furthermore, on his deathbed, Charlie realizes that it was not Christ, but "the Negative" that asked him to kill Father Hobbes, and that consequently he has been tricked. Hullah, on the other hand, unites good and evil in "the voice of the Tempter" (CM 444) that commanded the murder, and again he states that evil is sometimes necessary to pave the path for goodness in this world.

> As for Charlie himself, was not talk of murder an absurdity? Great affairs demand great actions and often there is somebody who must take a great risk. Remember Judas? The Betrayer, and the Execrated One, but could anybody seriously doubt that at this moment Judas has his place in Paradise, because he made possible the great drama upon which the world's salvation hangs? Every tragic action needs a Judas: no Hero without a Villain.
>
> (CM 444-445)

Hullah understands the connection of good with evil because he himself has already gone through the process of individuation, or transformation. His individuation started with his childhood illness and the Shaking Tent, and was completed when he got his second near-death experience in the bathtub in London. After he has been rescued from the bomb-raided hotel, he sees that good and bad are intimately linked.

> Did I receive no help from anything greater than the hope that the workers outside would find me? Did I not, when the patch of sky that I could see above me turned black, think of Mrs. Smoke and her helpers? Did I not remember that in *Faust* Mephistopheles says:
>
> *Dies sind die Kleinen*
> *Von den Meinen*
> *Hore, wie zu Lust und taten*
> *Altklug sie raten.*
>
> Are not these the Devil's helpers? And once Christian judgements are set aside, how does one know Mrs. Smoke's from the Devil's? Any helper, when one is in extremity, is a helper. If, as Faust says, the Devil is an egoist, who isn't an egoist when it comes to the crunch? Did I not plead, as I lay in that icy, filthy water, for Helpers, no matter whence they took their power?
>
> (CM 221)

Hullah thus diametrically opposes orthodox Christianity with Native American religion. Christianity, according to the *privatio boni*, always sees evil as secondary to good, while Native tribes accept the unity of the moral dichotomy. The trickster is the anthropomorphization of this: he is "the wolf in sheep's clothing [that] now goes about whispering in our ear that evil is really nothing but a misunderstanding of good and an effective instrument of progress" (Jung 1972:37).

The trickster does not only have the power to change the world, he can also change his own shape. Paul Radin puts it like this: "trickster himself is not infrequently identified with specific animals such a raven, coyote, hare, spider, but these animals are only secondarily to be equated with concrete animals. Basically, he possesses no well-defined form" (Radin 1972:xxiii-xxiv). The fact that the trickster is always in a state of flux blocks his definition.

The trickster-doctor Jonathan Hullah similarly lacks any description in the novel. In her review of *The Cunning Man,* Celia Wren writes that Hullah is "cunning in concealing his true character, and even by the end of the book his personality is still elusive" (1995:26). He is neither outwardly nor inwardly depicted. In his memoir, he even openly refuses to do so: "If I were describing myself I might say that my face bore a certain morose splendour, but I am not describing myself" (CM 240). Moreover, at Colborne College, his friend Brochwel Gilmartin compares him with the monster of Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Brocky, always eager to broaden his knowledge of English literature, says he must look up the name of the monster. When he does so, it proves not to have a name. Apart from the fact that Hullah's haziness mocks the convention of the classic realist tradition that characters should always receive a direct presentation, it is also functional with respect to his representation as a trickster figure.

Still, the text drops a few minor hints at Hullah's looks. These are again very vague. In one of her letters, Chips writes that the doctor is "long and cornery and quiet". She also compares him to "a horse with a secret sorrow" (CM 239). Moreover, his residence is a transformed horse stable, and over the principal entrance is a carved representation of three horses. The image of Hullah as a horse surfaces throughout the novel, the significance of which will be investigated in the next chapter.

Next to his tall and horse-like appearance, there is one more external feature of Hullah to be found in the text. In the performance of *Faust* by the Players' Guild, Hullah plays the minor role of the student. In the review of the play by a local newspaper, a journalist writes that he has a "fine archaeological figure" (CM 190). The reference is not isolated. At the end of the book, when Hullah realizes that he

has fallen in love with the young Esme, he again mentions it when he considers what he, as an old man, can give to the young woman (CM 460).

Hullah's archaeological looks are not coincidental or insignificant. When the mythological status of the trickster is taken into consideration, it is clear that also he is a figure of olden times. Jung writes that "he is obviously a 'psychologem,' an archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity. In his clearest manifestations he is a faithful reflection of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level" (1972:140). The trickster is an archetype that has been forgotten throughout the centuries through repression into the collective unconscious. But he refuses to be cast out. When modern man, and especially the modern artist, digs beneath the surface, trickster rises out of the ashes and shows that much of his ancient character still applies to our world.

In his role as an archetype of transformation, the trickster is often connected with the art of healing. Healing comes from the Old English 'haelen', which means 'to make or become whole'. Because the trickster has already confronted his shadow with his ego and internalised his shadow, he stands for an approximation of wholeness. As he can manage the polarity of his psyche, he is able to exert a development towards wholeness on others who have yet to challenge their shadow. The trickster "brings liberation from imprisonment in αγνοια, 'unconsciousness,' and is therefore a bringer of light as well as of healing" (Jung 1972:152). This is why the trickster has for a long time been identified with the healer. "In fact, one of the archetypes of transformation is based on the healing doctor-patient relationship" (Rosen 1998:224). Jung, correspondingly, sees many of the characteristics of the trickster in the Native shaman,

> for he, too, often plays malicious jokes on people, only to fall victim in his turn to the vengeance of those whom he has injured. For this reason, his profession sometimes puts him in peril of his life. Besides that, the shamanistic techniques in themselves often cause the medicine-man a good deal of discomfort, if not actual pain. At all events the "making of a medicine-man" involves, in many parts of the world, so much agony of body and soul that permanent psychic injuries may result. His "approximation to the saviour" is an obvious consequence of this, in confirmation of the mythological truth that the wounded wounder is the agent of healing, and that the sufferer takes away suffering.
>
> (1972:136)

The latter ambiguity, namely that the trickster is both healer and patient, displays a few things. First, the process of healing is never completed. Healing is always a

coming towards wholeness; the goal is never reached. The completion of the healing process is always over the horizon. In that sense, it gives a direction to one's life, and it never reaches a fulfilled state. Secondly, in order to be a healer, the shaman or the trickster must heal himself: he must change his own shape in addition to transforming others. He metamorphoses both others and himself; he is an archetype of transformation as well as a shape-shifter. For that matter, he is never above the law. Also he must abide the laws of nature and fatality.

The healing figure in the novel is, obviously, Dr. Jonathan Hullah. Already as a youth he decides to become a doctor. However, his actual healing method has only reached maturity after he has gone through the process of individuation. In his bathtub, he is finally able to complete the puzzle of his life: "I had what I must call a revelation in that tub and very slowly I came to some conclusions that have been important in shaping my life ever since" (CM 221). The conclusion he draws from the incident is that he has got to acknowledge his shadow figure, which he does. He also recognizes that good and evil are not to be set apart (see supra, p. 69-71).

Later in the story, Hullah illustrates the necessity for the healer to have gone through the healing process himself by means of a classic myth which he says comes from the Grimm collection. He tells the story of an Indian boy who wants to become a shaman. One day, the Indian stumbles upon a bottle with a little spirit inside. When he releases the spirit, it assumes a massive shape, and claims that it is the Great Windigo, and that it will eat the young Indian. Through the trickery of words, the shaman-to-be again imprisons the genie in the bottle. The spirit admits to his defeat and promises to make the Indian into a great shaman. He gives the boy a piece of parchment which can turn all materials into silver and which can heal all wounds. Eventually, the boy sets the spirit free and becomes a celebrated shaman. The story indeed comes from the Grimm collection, but in a slightly other form. In the story as Grimm took it down, the boy is the son of a poor old woodcutter who does not have enough money to support the education of his son. Significantly, the spirit in the tale is Mercurius, or Hermes. At the end of the supposedly original story, the boy becomes a very famous doctor.

When Hullah tells his friend Darcy Dwyer that the story comes from the Grimm collection, Darcy is suspicious and asks Hullah if it is not a myth of the Native tradition. Hullah responds that they "probably have some version of it" (CM 312). Indeed the story also appears in the culture of the same Native American tribe that is central to Hullah's development into a doctor of soul and body, namely the Ojibwa. The Ojibway tale goes by the name of *Windigo* and features a "cannibal spirit who embodies the malevolent power of a northern landscape and the

potential of all men for the windigo's destructiveness" (Monkman 1981:144). So, Davies questions the privileged status of the classic European tale by showing that the Native North American tradition has a very similar story: "it's one of those universal tales that contains a great truth" (CM 312). Moreover, he uses the Native story, and not the European version of the myth, as a framing story and allegory for his own *The Cunning Man*. This links Hullah with the shaman or Native medicine woman of the story, Elsie Smoke. In this way, Davies parodies the central tradition and gives a voice to the ex-centric culture of the American Indians. Finally, he also self-consciously ponders over his rewriting of the story: "I adapted it to my need" (CM 312).

Leslie Monkman writes that the story of the Windigo shows that "the windigo must first be acknowledged and then appeased through prayer and song" (1981:144). Even if Hullah knows that the healer must himself also have experienced the process of healing, he realizes that he must be wary not to become too high-minded. His shadow, though acknowledged, will never be numbed. He is both healer and patient, and cannot surpass the laws of nature. He makes this very clear through his interpretation of the Hermetic caduceus. The representation of the latter, which he has Emily make, is given a central place: it hangs in the entrance to his medical practice. Still, he feels that he has to add one more thing to make it represent his perspective of the role of the physician accurately.

> I liked the caduceus so much that I thought I would complete it with the name of the Greek concept that, with the caduceus, seemed to me to sum up my medical philosophy: the serpents of Wisdom and Knowledge, under the rule of Hermes, the medical god, and all under the dominion of Fate, or Necessity. So I got a good calligrapher to paint it in red and gold on the wall above the bronze staff. And there it stood.
>
> ΑΝΑΓΚΕ
>
> (CM 329)

The theme of Fate, or *Anangke*, carries the whole story. Hullah stresses his position as a mortal being by giving Necessity such prominence in his medical practice. What is more, the theme is also exemplified through the continuous reference to Goethe's *Faust* (see supra, p. 58-59).

Jonathan Hullah's unorthodox preoccupation with both body and soul (see supra, p. 55-57) is also to be found in the figure of the trickster. Russell Brown and Donna Bennett spot that the trickster of Davies's *The Deptford Trilogy*, Magnus Eisengrim, "is the reflection of the psyche of which Jung speaks, produced in that crucial conjunction of matter and spirit" (1976:353). Similarly, for the Native North

American tribes, mind and body are not separate realities (Lundquist 1991:31). The psychosomatic or somatopsychic medical outlook of Hullah, then, also supports the reading of his character as a trickster.

The trickster's healing powers are closely related to his association with fertility. Hermes is the classical Greek god of fertility. The Greeks expressed this by erecting Herms, or phallic statues, to their deity (Morford and Lenardon 1985:192). In this respect, it is not surprising that Hermes carries a staff. In Native American mythology, the trickster is always hungry and hot on satisfying his sexual desires. He is characterized by "two anatomical anomalies […]: an enormous phallus, which he carries in a box on his back, and vast quantities of intestines which he keeps wrapped around his body" (Brown and Bennett 1976:357). He also frequently burns his anus and is buried in excrement (Lundquist 1991:27). These two features, that is, the trickster's oversized phallus and his fascination with dung, are again an exemplification of man's shadow. Indeed, they embody the two carnal facets which mankind seems to find hardest to come to terms with.

The scatological and sexual hallmarks of the trickster are also incarnated by the character of Jonathan Hullah. Hullah's medical practice and residence are in fact transformed horse stables, so he practically lives in a former dunghill. And, young Hullah's sexual shadow is Eddu, a Métis lad who suffers from priapism, though in fact he enjoys it. Priapus, besides, is one of the sons of Hermes. Eddu indulges in sexual show-me-yours-I'll-show-you-mine games and even defiles himself by lying with Père Lartigue's dog. Hullah obviously loathes Eddu, and does not even consider him as a beast of nature, but "civilization gone askew" (CM 36). Yet, to a less askew extent, Hullah also takes interest in the flesh, though his interest is of a professional nature. His eccentric reputation as a doctor is among others based on the attention he devotes to his patients' bowels and private parts. In the conversation that is so crucial to his diagnostic system, he steadfastly asks the patient if he or she has any interest in sex. What is more, another part of his method of diagnosis consists in having his patients undress completely, sniffing them everywhere and listening to intestinal movement for quite a while. He also takes note of the medical condition of the patient's secret areas. He is very quick to spot haemorrhoids and other disorders of the anus or the bowels.

Hullah claims that this kind of examination is necessary because "only a partial estimate can be made of the quality of a life unless we know something about the defecatory habits of the patients" (CM 398), but there is more. The importance that Hullah attaches to the bowels traces back to his medical training at university. In a practical, his professor of surgery has his students take a peep at the bottom of

another professor, who had developed a fistula of the anus. The investigated professor, who is a Welshman, jokes that the Welsh have a strong conviction that if they ever get into a hospital, they never get out of it. Hullah knows that humour nearly always gives vital information on the true condition of the jester, and ponders over the underlying significance of jokes. In this respect, he reminisces about Faust.

> What made me think that? A natural disposition to look at the underside of everything, I suppose, greatly encouraged by my exploration of *Faust* […] Goethe knew the secrets of the human heart, and would have made a fine physician if he had not been called to greater things.
>
> (CM 165)

Of course, Hullah's "natural disposition to look at the *underside* of everything" (my italics) is a pun, and a very fine one indeed. The interconnection of humour, the unconscious, the anus and the shadow of *Faust* fits into the picture of the trickster as it has been hitherto outlined. The trickster as a collective shadow figure is very keen on the bowels because they reveal something of our other nature. Magic may be shit, after the native shaman, but as a matter of fact, truth is to be found in shit as well. Besides, as we will see later on, also humour is one of the attributes of the trickster.

Hullah, as a doctor of the underside, echoes another scientific character in Davies's work. In *The Rebel Angels*, professor Ozias Froats revives a past tradition in science, namely the study of faeces, or *scatomancy*: "People have always been interested in their faeces; primitive people take a look after they've had a motion, to see if it tells them anything, and there are more civilized people who do that than you'd suppose" (RA 102). In the Middle Ages, the diagnosis of human faeces was a common practice to see what ailed the patient, just as the way of looking at urine proved an interesting medical examination. Hullah, by the way, has a picture of a topos in Dutch medieval painting, namely that of the "doctor squinting at […] a flask of pee" (CM 261), or "De Piskijker". Of course, in medieval times, science had not yet reached the advanced stage it has now, but the physicians could still find out a few things on the basis of smell. The tradition was kept up and given new and more developed scientific attention by, among others, the Canadian physician William Osler, whom is also referred to in *The Cunning Man.*

So, Hullah inquires into both the guts and the private parts because they yield up essential information on the nature of the psyche. As he exerts his diagnostic practice on his real patients as well as on the notable characters of fiction, he also

writes down a few passages for his *Anatomy of Fiction*, in which he explores the excremental and sexual condition of his fictional patients. In one of his notes, he applies the technique of scatomancy to Dickens's characters. At the end of the excerpt, he asks himself: "has this line of investigation anything to do with the *shadow* that has come over Glebe House? Yes it has. If I could have a look at Emily, and perhaps have an analysis of two or three of her stools […]" (CM 400, my italics). Hullah's choice of words again betrays that he sees the intestinal realm in the light of the shadow, and that the human being needs to meet it instead of repressing it into some dark corner. Constipation of the shadow will eventually weigh on the human psyche, and therefore, the shadow needs to be released.

In *The Rebel Angels*, the references to the Canadian doctor of scatomancy William Osler are intimately connected with the many allusions to the medieval occultist, philosopher, alchemist and physician Theophrastus Paracelsus. Paracelsus is a significant intertext in *The Cunning Man* as well. Hullah even calls himself a Paracelsian physician (CM 438). The link between Paracelsus and Hullah consists in their holistic world-view which combines the material with the celestial and the hylic with the psychic.

The psychosomatic and somatopsychic philosophy which both Hullah and Paracelsus entertain is also rooted in the medieval tradition of alchemy. According to Jung, who was deeply interested in Paracelsus, "with the decline of alchemy the symbolical unity of spirit and matter fell apart, with the result that modern man finds himself uprooted and alienated in a de-souled world" (1972:43). Paracelsus also valued alchemy highly in the context of medicine. Significantly, also Hermes and Dr. Faust are alchemists, and Mercurius in the fairy tale of *The Spirit in the Bottle* gives the boy a parchment which can heal wounds with one side, and turn materials into silver with the other side. So, if Hullah is a physician that regards body and soul in their inextricable and paradoxically oppositional union, and bears much similarity with Hermes, Dr. Faust, and the scholar in the fairy tale, there must also be a bit of an alchemist inside him. This is corroborated by the fact that Hullah's father is a metallurgist. Also his concern with excrement makes him into a modern alchemist. As Patricia Monk points out, in *The Rebel Angels*,

> [Ozias] Froats's study of excrement identifies him as a modern alchemist in the exoteric tradition, since (as Davies would have discovered in his reading of Jung), "Excrement in alchemy signifies the *prima materia"*, the substance from which […] the exoteric alchemists started in their work […] Exoteric alchemy is concerned with attempts to prepare […] the philosophers' stone, or simply the Stone, endowed with the power of transmuting the base

> metals lead, tin, copper, iron, and mercury into the precious base metals gold and silver.
>
> (1986:92)

In their search of gold, alchemists have discovered the metal alloy of latten. The caduceus Hullah has made by Emily Raven-Hart is made out of this material (CM 305). So, the neat intertwinement of Hullah's enthusiasm for excrement, soul and body, and metal alloys labels him as an alchemist. Above all, alchemy is sometimes called 'the art of transformation', so this again links Hullah up with the trickster.

In *The Rebel Angels,* Ozias Froats is also called "a Paracelsian magus" (Monk 1986:94). Paracelsus was indeed also identified with the figure of the magus. Hullah, too, can be seen in this perspective. In one of his accounts on the death of Father Hobbes, Hullah thinks: "Was I Simon Magus, the false magician, being warned off by St. Peter, the true one? Whatever, I was warned away from the sacred precinct; my kind of magic was not wanted" (CM 343). Hullah's patients frequently regard him as a magician, because he has the ability to look beyond the material into the spiritual.

> "It sounds to me as if you really wanted to consult a fortune-teller," said I.
> "That is not so far wide of the mark as you may think. A man of my temperament, as he grows older, becomes increasingly aware of influences that younger men dismiss as occult. To be frank, everything I hear of you suggests that you can give me an answer that is not tied to scientific examinations, or statistically determined probabilities."
>
> (CM 352)

Hullah also thinks of humanist doctors as fortune-tellers. When Chips asks him if Emily is going to die, he answers: "Doctors are like fortune-tellers, Chips. That's the one question they absolutely refuse to answer" (CM 428).

In one instance, Hugh McWearie too calls Hullah a magician: "Take heed, old magician! Take heed, Cunning Man!" (CM 461). Hullah's nickname, which is also the title of the book, reveals a lot as well. The meaning of the name, he says, traces back to ancient times.

> It was a sort of person that used to be found in a lot of English villages. There was a Wise Woman or else a Cunning Man. Never both in the same place. He could set bones, after a fashion, and knew a bit of horse-doctoring, and if somebody had overlooked your cattle he could take off the spell, and maybe track down the overlooker, and then there would be a contest of wizards. A Cunning Man was a sort of village know-all.
>
> (CM 465)

Hullah's/Davies's paradoxical relation to the English heritage here again crops up. He says that the Cunning Man was a magician in old England, but of course, in the indigenous tradition the shaman is a cunning man too. In this way, the figure of Hullah, who is affiliated with both the English and the Native American tradition, bridges the gaps between both cultures.

However, if Hullah is a trickster figure that is characterized by its ambiguity, his relationship with magic cannot be transparent. He repeatedly refuses to be associated with the power of magic. When Esme asks him for the significance of the nickname he is given, he replies: "Nonsense, of course" (CM 465). When she asks him after the whereabouts of the spirit of her murdered husband, he says: "If I knew that I would indeed be a Cunning Man" (CM 465). At the end of the novel, he openly divulges the illusion of his intuition: "The telephone rings. My intuition suggests a wrong number. Not that great intuition is needed; a nearby new cinema has been granted a number that is only one digit away from mine, and wrong numbers are common" (CM 469).

Hullah even more openly recognizes his ambiguity in the passage in which the resolution of his adulterous affair with Nuala is displayed (see chapter 4, p. 34-35). He says, "Turn the Wizard toward the light, and you see that he is also the Fool" (CM 388). The wizard and the fool, who at first sight seem to be so different from one another, are paradoxically embodied in one and the same character.

John Fowles, with whose writing Davies displays much similarity, also stresses this ambiguous and close relationship of the magician and the fool. In *The Magus*, these two figures are first diametrically opposed. In the novel, this is achieved through the confrontation of Nicholas Urfe and Conchis. Nicholas is inferior to the magic of Conchis, and is duped by him. So, Conchis is cast as the magus, whereas Nicholas Urfe is the fool. The epigraph to *The Magus* refers to the novel's intertextual relationship with the Tarot card deck. In the hierarchy of Tarot, "the first [card] (or last in some systems), numbered zero, is the Fool; the second, Roman numeral one, is the Magus or Magician" (Olshen 1978:44). However, the gap between Nicholas and Conchis is gradually narrowed. The novel in fact tells the story of Nicholas's individuation and evolution from ignorance to self-knowledge. Initially, he is Conchis's subordinate; in the end, he becomes his equal. The Fool contains thus, in Jung's words, the seed of an *enantiodromia*, of a conversion into its opposite, that is, a transformation into the Magus. Or,

> the Fool and the Magus are the alpha and omega of human experience. The Fool is the occult representative of the Many. In his sack he carries the

> magical symbols of the wand, cup, sword, and pentacle, but he has no understanding of their meaning and power. He is ignorant until he learns of the potential which is man's, and impotent until he can act on this knowledge. When he knows, he gains self-mastery; when he acts, he becomes master of his world. In these terms, Nicholas's growing self-awareness and self-acceptance may be seen as the evolution from Fool to Magus, what has previously been referred to as the destiny of the elect.
>
> (Olshen 1978:45-46)

The ambiguous relationship of Fool and Magus is incarnated in the figure of the trickster. The trickster, in his equivocality, is both magician and fool: "Trickster accounts for the twinness in humans. He is both a giver and a taker, one who tricks and is tricked" (Lundquist 1991:25).

This being so, Hullah is not only the magus of *The Cunning Man*, but also the fool. In his encounters with Doc Ogg, he always concludes that Ogg is a fool, but a slightly different fool than himself.

> Since then I have met so many fools who were vastly more learned than Doc Ogg, and a few holy fools whose lives provoked awe and sometimes terror, and scores of common or garden fools who nevertheless managed to muddle their way through life, skating on the very thin ice that divided them from any real knowledge of themselves or the world about them, without once falling through, that I do not regard the term "fool" as dismissive or even severe.
>
> I have myself played the role of fool in so many guises that I feel a kinship with fools, much as I try to avoid being infected with their folly. For folly is one of the infections toward which Doc's much-vaunted Science has never turned its Cyclops eye.
>
> (CM 49)

In contrast with Ogg, Hullah is more than just a fool. He carries within him the seed of individuation, whereas Ogg procrastinates and even inhibits the possibility of epiphany. Hullah confirms this when he considers his foolish infatuation with the much younger Esme: "In short, I was a fool, and an old fool. But not totally a fool. I had to resort to my *Anatomy*, hoping it would have some advice for me, as I hoped that in future it would have advice for others" (CM 456). Hullah digs into his *Anatomy*, and investigates his own self in his Case Book. By taking his own medicine, he makes clear the road to self-knowledge and individuation. In this way, he metamorphoses from Fool to Magus, without completely letting go of the Fool in himself, precisely because the Fool is the key to knowledge, and because the healing, or individuation is never finished. This is why the shadow in one's self has to be recognized. As Elsie Smoke says, "you fool everybody else. But you don't fool your own self" (CM 40).

The trickster's characterization as fool also accommodates his use of humour. In Native culture, "there [is] indeed a sensibility, a spirit, at work and at play in the practice of many of the artists, grounded in a fundamentally comic world view and embodied in the traditional Native North American trickster" (Ryan 1999:xii). Trickster tales are often considered by the Western world to be secular, precisely because of the humorous nature of the stories and of the archetype. For Natives, however, humour represents exactly the opposite. It is sacred, because laughter has a healing effect, and because it is a tool which helps to keep balance (Lundquist 1991:27-28). Humour, and, in a postmodernist context even more importantly, irony

> [bind] widely separated opposites into a single figure so that contraries appear to belong together. In Trickster chaos and order, sacred and profane, farce and meaning, silence and song, food and waste, word and event, pretended ignorance and pretended cunning, stone-life and flesh-life, male and female, play and reality, compose not only an ironic symbol but a symbol of irony.
> Trickster's character and exploits embody the process of ironic imagination. His dynamism of composition mocks, shatters and re-forms the overly clear structures of the world and the overly-smooth images of the mind. […] In him the double-sidedness of reality reveals itself.
>
> (quoted in Ryan 1999:8)

So, for Natives, the trickster is, through his healing use of humour, a holy rather than a secular being.

Davies, who is as a Canadian not exactly Western in his thinking, contests the interpretation of humour and the trickster in terms of secularity. In *The Deptford Trilogy*, he mocks monotheism because it gets rid of humour:

> Whereas the Devil, when he is represented in literature, is full of excellent jokes, and we can't resist him because he and his jokes make so much sense. To twist an old saying, if the Devil had not existed, we should have to invent him. He is the only explanation of the appalling ambiguities of life. I give you the Devil!
>
> (quoted in Brown 1976:359)

Thus, Davies adopts the Native world-view that the trickster's humour and irony are needed to interpret and deal with the polarity of existence.

In *The Cunning Man*, an equally comic perspective is present. Hullah's inclination to look at the underside of jests is already one instance of this (see p. 75-77). Moreover, in his student days, Hullah struggles to acquire the feel for and mastery of irony. He defines it as "the *drye mock*. Not sarcasm, which is like

vinegar, or cynicism, which is so often the voice of disappointed idealism, but a delicate casting of a cool and illuminating light on life, and thus an enlargement" (CM 150). The ironist is, unlike the wit, not concerned with humour for the purpose of humour alone. His main objective is to bring together the oppositions which mankind is subjected to.

> He stands, so to speak, somewhat at one side, observes and speaks with moderation which is occasionally embellished with a flash of controlled exaggeration. He speaks from a certain depth, and thus he is not of the same nature as the wit, who so often speaks from the tongue and no deeper. The wit's desire is to be funny; the ironist is only funny as a secondary achievement.
>
> (CM 150)

Irony is intricately connected with the human condition. Because it sits on the verges of binaries, it is never satisfactory or unambiguous: "Fortune, who dearly loves such tricks, was having a little sport with them both, and Fortune may show a Chaucerian roughness when she cracks jokes" (CM 126).

Because true humour is never insignificant, it is sometimes difficult to tell irony or humour from evil. In *The Cunning Man*, Davies weds irony with sin. Sin and humour are drastically opposed to what he has before already called *folly*, i.e. foolishness without bringing anything to it, or foolishness that does not convert into its opposite: "Angus turns his sin into folly, and so silly people think it doesn't really matter. But it does matter. Sin is very serious business" (CM 169). Because both sin and irony tell something about the human psyche, they go hand in hand. In the novel, the opposition folly vs. sin is epitomized by the antagonism between Jock and Angus on the one hand and Darcy Dwyer on the other hand. Darcy, by the way, plays the role of the trickster Mephistopheles in *Faust*: "Jock's notions of sin were rather gloomy and Dostoevskian; he did not think there could ever be any fun in it. The argument was a self-defeating one: if something was amusing, it couldn't be sin. But Darcy spread a wider net" (CM 176). To give an example of how good the marriage between sin and humour is, Darcy arranges a meeting in the Coburg Social Parlours in Toronto. The affair is a surprise to everyone but Darcy, and when they arrive, there seems to be a gathering for some sort of contest. Darcy puts Hullah forward as the judge of the competition, who soon finds out that he is in the middle of the Annual Bad Breath Contest. The event is of the nature of the fabliau genre, and is hilarious generally, but the Faustian shadow is also present. Looking back upon the contest in his Case Book, Hullah realizes that the winner of the contest was indeed seriously ill. In addition, she gets an envelope full of money,

which makes the corruption even worse. So, there is no denying that sin and humour often get together in a way that reveals much of the human psyche. Moreover, Hullah's concluding speech on the medical knowledge of halitosis and on the contest as a whole, was, according to Darcy, truly "Mephistophelean" (CM 185), and, in this way, it shows what lies beneath.

A final earmark of the trickster archetype, which perhaps forms his chief quality, is his virtuosity and trickery with language. In the original Homeric myth, Hermes tries to trick others through his lies and cunningness with words: "Hermes answered him with clever words" (Morford and Lenardon 1985:190). His mastery of the subtle art of rhetoric makes him into a persuader and even a liar. Therefore, he is also the patron of thieves and merchants. Through language, he covers things up for his own purpose. However, the specificity of his lies resides in the fact that they are always obvious. In the myth, Hermes exaggeratedly insists on his sincerity: "Father Zeus, I shall indeed tell you the truth. For I am honest and I do not know how to lie. […] what I tell you is the truth" (Morford and Lenardon 1985:188). So, initially the trickster covers up the truth, but in the end, his trickery is always found out. He builds up an illusion and then destroys it. He tricks others, and then gets his fingers burnt. In this way, he tricks himself as well. The trickster is always a figure of doubleness: he is both a liar and an unmasker, to others as well as to himself.

Jonathan Hullah, as the storyteller primarily concerned with language, is the liar of *The Cunning Man*. As has already been pointed out (see chapter 4, p. 36), he is deeply aware of the intransparency of his words: "Everything I am lies behind everything I say" (CM 20). He recognizes that his language is not a reliable instrument to reach a coherent understanding of the world outside language. Rather than covering reality, his discourse constructs a separate reality. However, the quotation reveals more than a reflection on postmodern epistemology. Everything Hullah is, not only *is* behind what he says, everything he is also *tells lies* behind everything he says. In other words, the pun shows that Hullah is not only subjected to the incapacity of language to mediate or represent the world, but that he also self-consciously exploits the system of language to his own advantage: "I have much to conceal, and I shall do so" (CM 14). Or, he transforms the world by telling lies. The person whom Hullah ultimately tricks, then, is Esme Barron, the journalist of the *Colonial Advocate.* The victimization of Esme is even foregrounded by the fact that she stands for the discourses that are generally believed to inform most objectively, i.e. journalism and detective reports, and, by extension, detective fiction.

As a trickster, Hullah eventually tricks himself too. Throughout the story, he asks himself where his antipathy towards Esme comes from: "Why? Why have I a scunner against Esme that I try to fight down as unworthy and potentially mischievous? Why do I watch her, and listen to her, waiting to pounce on any unhappy phrase, any trivial solecism, any flaw?" (CM 202). Obviously, he tries to steer her away from any knowledge he has about the tragedy that happened on the morning of Good Friday at St. Aidan's: "Perhaps I fear that she will trick me into some confidence about that affair at St. Aidan's that I do not want to make public" (CM 204). There is indeed a battle of tricksters going on between them. Still, there must be more. Hullah's anxiety to spill the beans on the mysterious death of Hobbes only haunts him when he is in the company of Esme, and not with others. As to the reason why, he drops a few hints in his Case Book.

> I wish I could figure out why I do not quite like Esme. No; that's wrong. I like her well enough; I find her attractive sexually, which is unsuitable in a godfather but I might as well be honest about it, in this confidential record. But I don't fully trust her, and there again I cannot say why.
>
> (CM 204)

Finally, near the end of the story, Hullah gets his epiphany. He finds out that he has fallen deeply in love with the young Esme.

> After the masque, the anti-masque: after the tragedy, the farce. Emily Raven-Hart and Charles Iredale had played out personal dramas that were in terms of the time, and their situation, and their limitations, tragedies. Now was the time for the harlequinade, where old, doting Pantaloon is fooled and tricked and exposed in all his senile ineptitude, to the guffaws of the mob.
>
> (CM 453)

The masque, or the tragedy is not only the tragedy of Charles and Emily. Hullah has for himself constructed in language, i.e. in his Case Book, an illusion which he has come to believe. He has become the protagonist of his own play. He has hoaxed himself into believing that he was not getting infatuated with Esme, while actually he was already up to his ears in it. Ultimately, the curtain falls and the mask is removed. He admits to himself his love for Esme and realizes that he has tricked his own self into a delusion. Thus, the trickster Hullah is a liar and unmasker to himself as well as to others.

The trickster's game with language demonstrates that he has gathered sufficient knowledge of it. His ability to break down the rules and conventions of speech presupposes his previous acquaintance with these rules and conventions. In

classical Greek mythology, Hermes is the messenger of the gods as well as the god of eloquence, the god *Logios* (Hamlyn 1963:50). Also in Native American and African mythology, he is gifted with speech and is "often regarded as the culture hero who has brought the arts of living to mankind" (Leach 1972:1123). In this respect, he is, both in central Greek (Bartelink 1969:126) and in peripheral native culture (Ryan 1999:xi), considered an artist. The combination of both strains, i.e. the trickster's eloquence and his artistic status, makes of him a storyteller as well as a writer.

The storyteller and writer of *The Cunning Man*, again, is Jonathan Hullah. Of course, he is not the only writer in the story, but it is mainly through his perspective that the novel is narrated, and he is also the protagonist, so he may be regarded as the chief storyteller.

Summing up, in the figure of Hullah, who at first sight seems to be merely a Canadian physician, though an unconventional one, different strains come together. He is in the first place a healer. Because of his unorthodox healing methods and his past, which are undeniably rooted in Native experience, he very much resembles the healer of the indigenous tradition, namely the shaman. His murky reputation and familiarity with metal identify him with the occult healer or the alchemist. He is a figure of doubleness in that he embodies both magician and fool. In the context of ambiguity, his passion for irony, or *the drye mock*, is significant as well. And finally, his paradoxical nature also shows in the fact that he is both liar and unmasker, as he can create illusions and destroy them. This being so, in *The Cunning Man*, Davies weaves an intricate network of intertextual references, which in the end all boil down to the major intertext of the archetype of the trickster. All of the trickster's traits are embodied in the character of Hullah.

It is time to broaden the scope again to the status of the trickster as artist. The anthropologist Barbara Babcock writes: "That the trickster and the clown have become major metaphors for the artist in this century with its increasing self-consciousness of the creative process is no accident. They have been artists for a long time" (quoted in Ryan 1999:xi). Indeed, in a postmodern context, the trickster as artist gains an additional significance.

Arguably the most important catchphrase in postmodern philosophy is Jean-François Lyotard's disbelief in metanarratives. He showed that the Grand Narratives that held sway over Western culture are increasingly criticized in the postmodern world. This is neatly connected with the loss of faith in language and narrative as mirrors of the world. If language can no longer proffer a coherent view on reality, then neither can any discourse that is constructed out of the linguistic system. The

French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who fathered the deconstructionist strain in literary theory, investigated more closely why narratives can no longer profess to be orderly and objective. Simply put, he states that any narrative, which comes about through a continuous arrangement of binaries, can only exist if it ignores that with which it cannot cope. In order to construct its own opposition A vs. B, it has to disregard anything that cannot be associated with either A or B. Through an investigation of the bits that are cast out by the system, the narrative can be deconstructed. In this way, ultimately any story can be unmasked.

Unmasking precisely is the chief strategy of the trickster. Trickster himself represents that which has been marginalized by the system. As Jung states, "the so-called civilized man has forgotten the trickster" (1972:147). He embodies what is repressed by the system. He is the collective shadow. However, he refuses to be cast out:

> [Modern man] never suspects that his own hidden and apparently harmless shadow has qualities whose dangerousness exceeds his wildest dreams. As soon as people get together in masses and submerge the individual, the shadow is mobilized, and, as history shows, may even be personified and incarnated.
>
> (Jung 1972:147)

That which is repressed will inevitably return. Or, as Samuel Marchbanks puts it: "Of course I am an anarchist. What is an anarchist but a defier of settled power, a protester against all rule, a detector of flaws in every system, a [necessary] element in society" (Marchbanks XI). Also in the writings of the Canadian novelist Robert Kroetsch, the trickster represents that which contests the system: he "is the embodiment of the irrational and amoral principle in life, of the dismissal of logic in favor of sheer inconsistency" (Bertacco 2002:101).

The trickster expresses his predilection for inconsistency and disentanglement of hierarchy through his treacherous words and through his use of irony. The lying trickster thrusts his staff between signifier and signified, rather than having them coincide. Moreover, he does so openly. The typicality of the trickster's game with words is that his lies are blatant. In this way, he overtly foregrounds the clash between his words and the world, between language and reality. In postmodernist metafiction, similarly, this gap is put to the forefront. The myth of unproblematic literary mimesis is taken down and replaced by a disbelief of texts representing the world truthfully. In the light of artistic ethics, then, metafictional texts are morally good, because they spotlight the representational delusion. So, the reader is warned about the text's misreading of reality (MacHale 1987:218-222).

Hullah's emphasis on his nature as a liar equally makes him into a morally good person. He tricks Esme, but eventually the truth about Hobbes's death still comes to the surface. However, one might be tempted to think why Esme never gets to know the true nature of the events, and why, conversely, the reader of *The Cunning Man*, through Hullah's diary, does. The answer is to be sought in what Esme stands for. As a journalist, but also as a detective, she represents the factual mode of writing, which purports to present reality as it is. Hullah, on the other hand, incarnates the exact opposite, namely the lying narrative. Esme relates fact, whereas Hullah tells fiction. Still, because Hullah underscores his lying *and* his inability to grasp reality ("Everything I am *lies* behind everything I say"), he makes up for his shortcomings. Esme is then convicted for her lying, because she does not acknowledge it. At the end of the novel, Esme turns from fact to fiction, when she tells Hullah that she is fed up with journalism, and tries to really start writing creatively. It might then be expected that in the last part of what was to become Davies's *The Toronto Trilogy*, in which *The Cunning Man* comes second, and sadly last, Esme would be given a more prominent role. Moreover she might finally even be told the truth about the murder at St. Aidan's.

Irony is also a form of lying in that it puts relational oppositions upside down or, as regards form and content, inside out. Its role in postmodernist writing, then, consists in subverting binaries and consequently in showing that opposites do not hold. It first binds opposites to each other, and in pointing to their similarities, it radically deconstructs their antagonism. Irony gives both sides of the argument, and in this way, it levels out hierarchy. Through his ironical grin, similarly, trickster reforms the world, and moves from an unacknowledged and corrupt to an ethically good illusion: "This ability of the trickster to turn on its head every idea and every event, and death above all, accounts for the humor he provokes as he embodies the radically metamorphic character of man and his imagination" (Lundquist 1991:93).

Lies and irony are paradoxical instances of making and unmaking. The trickster produces lies, but in his openness, he betrays himself and undoes them. The ironist in him too unmakes the prevalent oppositional order. Both lies and irony are part of the postmodernist writer's box of tricks. Hullah, as an alter ego of Davies, stands for the postmodernist writer. He openly recognizes his paradoxical nature. This is particularly clear in the passage in which he defies the conventions of the romantic genre (see chapter 4, p. 34-35). In this passage, he first builds up an illusion. Because he continues to sleep with Nuala, the wife of his best friend Brochwel, even when they are married, he speaks of himself in terms of Lancelot of the Lake and of

Brocky as the cuckolded King Arthur. But, Davies then subverts the convention by pointing out that Brocky resorted to a private detective to unclothe the adultery. The clash of the highly conventionalised and incompatible genres of romance and detective eventually unmasks the romantic illusion. Davies then goes even further and uncovers the conventions of his own genre.

> Worst of all I saw myself not as Lancelot of the Lake, the self-hating adulterer, and decidedly not as the figure in the centre ring of the circus, but as a sideshow in the lives of the two people I loved best.
>
> (CM 388)

Hullah overtly acknowledges that he is playing a role in a story, which is that of the lives of his best friends. Obviously, to the reader, this is highly ironical. He or she knows that Brocky and Nuala are only characters in a story, and precisely not in the story of their own lives, but in Davies's story of *The Cunning Man.* Moreover, because Hullah recognizes the role he is pushed into by the author, i.e. the role of a character in a story, Davies skates the borders of narratives. A crucible of Hullah and Davies comes into being, which openly unmasks the illusion of fiction. Davies, then, is both the magician that gradually builds up the illusion, and the fool that consequently destroys it by pointing out the conventions of his own genre. Ironically, though, Davies's subversion of convention is in its turn a convention of his literary genre, namely postmodernist metafiction.

Hullah and Davies are both the maguses and fools of *The Cunning Man.* They embody the paradox which the trickster carries within. This is why Hullah, and by extension Davies, cannot think of himself only as the romantic magician. After the conclusion of his affair with Nuala and his confrontation with Brocky, he shortly thinks of killing himself, as romantic fiction prescribes it. But then, he says: "But I had no appetite for suicide and I came at last to a recognition of myself as, *in part*, a Tom Sawyer who wanted everything done according to the rules of romantic fiction, and complicated simple situations with his absurd adolescent, book-born nonsense" (CM 388). The magic love of narrative goes hand in hand with the foolish unmasking of its artifice: "*In part*; it is important to stress that qualification. The romantic lunatic and the shallow-witted adolescent were not the whole of Dr. Hullah, who was so successful at *unravelling and reweaving* the fabric of other people's lives" (CM 388, my italics). The trickster is both conjuror and unmasker, both writer and rewriter: "After the masque, the anti-masque" (CM 453). In this way, he is an exponent of the postmodernist manifesto.

Unmasking and masking, unravelling and reweaving, belong to the practice of postmodernist parodical intertextuality. The postmodernist writer is then the trickster that both magically and foolishly masters use and abuse. He foregrounds the critical distance of the parodical dichotomy, and brings to it eternal balance.

A critical approach to dominant texts allows for a change of the current literary status quo. The paradox of unmasking and masking, i.e. parodic intertextuality, thus has a healing effect. The postmodernist writer also fits into this picture of healing. Robert Kroetsch, who makes extensive use of the trickster figure in his writing as well, thinks of the postmodernist writer as " 'a sick healer' and a 'lying truth-teller' " (Hutcheon 1988b:182). He is, in Jung's vocabulary, or is it in the doctrine of Christianity, "the wounded wounder […] [that] takes away suffering" (Jung 1972:136). He has had to go through the process of masking and unmasking as well, and is now able to pass it on. This then explains why the medical intertext is so important in *The Cunning Man.*

Lies and irony are not only identical with regard to their obvious paradox and their concern with intertextuality and healing, they are also subversive in nature. They have a specific significance in the context of parody. A reversal of binaries firstly presupposes the linking of signifier and signified, and consequently the reintroduction of their critical distance. After Hutcheon, both irony and lies point to an eternal struggle of opposites, without any resolution in either direction. In *The Cunning Man*, this critical doubleness is symbolized by the caduceus of snakes. The original Hermetic caduceus is rewritten and parodied over Dr. Faust in the character of the Native medicine woman Elsie Smoke, and finally in that of Jonathan Hullah.

Significantly, with his friends, Hullah goes by the nickname Pyke, which is an obvious reference to the Hermetic staff, as well as to the Native trickster's phallus. In postmodernist terms, by means of his stick, he keeps up the critical gap between word and world, fiction and fact, or any other binary that *The Cunning Man* displays. As a trickster, he stands for that which the system turns its gaze away from. The system casts out trickster in order to maintain its credibility.

So, although Hullah purports to scorn the literary critical movement of Deconstructionism and dismisses it as "com[ing] from France, as so many brilliant, short-lived notions do", apparently because he finds it elitist (CM 375), he clearly inscribes himself in the broad philosophical field which it created. He carries a deep concern for that which ideology expels and marginalizes in order to survive. In this way, *The Cunning Man*'s play with postmodernism is connected with its relation to the post-colonial.

Even though literary theorists have not yet reached an agreement on whether the *post* in post-colonial is or is not the same as in postmodernism (D'Haen 1997:16-17), it may be stated that both literary strains still have one basic feature in common. Undeniably, they share a concern for the marginalized. Still, the salient difference between the two approaches of the Other is that the post-colonial inclusion of the periphery "implies a theory of agency […] and of social change that the postmodern deconstructive impulse lacks" (Hutcheon 1991:90). The post-modernist text is obsessed with the ex-centric in its revalorisation of discourses that were considered minor (myths, fairytales etc.), and in its exposure of the failure of language as realistic mimicry. The post-colonial narrative adds to this a social perspective and gives a voice to the socially repressed.

For instance, the significance of Hullah's name tags him an outcast. His nickname Pyke derives from the nineteenth-century composer and musical educator John Pyke Hullah. Brocky looks up the name "Hullah", and finds that it is of Huguenot origin. The Huguenots represent the religious margin which was persecuted by the Catholic centre. Besides, when Darcy Dwyer prepares to provide one of Toronto's statues with a new inscription (an act of rewriting!), he says he can count on the help of a few Methodists, who again belongs to another religious minority (CM 159).

The primary Other in *The Cunning Man* and in Canadian tradition generally is the Indian. Though Hullah makes overt references to Hermes, the healer *par excellence* in European myth, he really is a continuation of the Native shaman. His caduceus of snakes consists of Massasauga rattlers, and not of the original Greek serpents. In pointing to his indebtedness to Native tradition, Davies includes the typical Canadian Other.

Davies's novel can be seen as a text that shows the relation of the Canadian with the Indian in a realistic and mature way. He opposes texts such as Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha,* in which Indian myth is translated in terms of sentimental romance as we find it in European tradition. Longfellow's *Song* inaugurated a period of white interest in Native myth. Although his text attracted a large readership and seemed to provide a genuine care for Indian culture, it contains many anthropological inaccuracies (Monkman 1981:128). It may then be seen as a translation of the Indian into the European language and world-view. Consequently, the canonical *Song of Hiawatha* does not appeal to Hullah, nor does it convince him of the Indian reality. Because he lives close to the setting of the myth of Hiawatha, and he sees that the Indians he knows do not behave like those in the myth, he realizes that what Longfellow did was cover reality with European

poetical garlands: “I could not delude myself with high-flown nonsense” (CM 36). Besides, the passage points out a short-circuit between fact and fiction, and it shows that Hullah is aware of the artifice of literature.

In my opinion, Davies turns to the Indian for three reasons. First, the Indian, as trickster figure, serves Davies to establish a postmodernist discourse. In the philosophy – if such a central term may be used to denote the world-view of others at all – of the Native North American, language is not a mirror of reality, but reality is a mirror of language (Lundquist 1991:90). In postmodern thought, similarly, words construct their own world, rather than covering reality. Secondly, the relation of the Canadian with the Indian functions as an interesting comparison with the relation of the British heritage or the more recent American cultural imperialism with Canadian art. In Canada, as the pre-eminent nation of doubleness (Hutcheon 1991:82), the opposition centre-periphery is two-fold. The final motivation for Davies’s use of the Indian in his writing, which is connected with the previous one, is that Canadians, as a people of immigrants, are often accused of having no culture of their own, and of therefore taking resort to the British or American bond. In *The Cunning Man*, Davies states that Canada indeed has an original culture, i.e. that of the Natives, and that it is consequently important not to deny its roots in the Indian and Métis community. He refutes the allegation that the term post-colonial in Canada is only applied to Canada as peripheral to the world (Hutcheon 1991:75), and not to Canada and the others it itself drives out.

In short, *The Cunning Man* is a novel that uses the trickster figure and his doubleness to meet postmodern and post-colonial questions. In a postmodern context, his polarity is significant in the light of human existence and episteme. In his doubleness, he is a figure that skates the boundaries of fact and fiction. Because of this, he makes possible the postmodern practice of metafiction as a critical investigation of how the text relates to real life. In the novel, this is exemplified by the fictionalisation of the argument on parody as treated extensively by Linda Hutcheon.

The trickster’s ambiguity is even more important with regard to intertextuality. The polarity of texts is the foundation of the process of rewriting and intertextuality. Trickster remakes the word of past and dominant literature in a parodical way. Next to the intercourse of the text and reality, his subversive laugh is responsible for the critical dialogue (in the Bakhtinian sense) between different texts. Trickster’s reforming grin and his nature as an archetype of transformation account for his use of intertextuality. With his staff, he cleverly balances the use and abuse of texts.

Next to the postmodernist realm, the trickster's practice of parody also aims at the reformation of the social centre, whereby the voice of the Other or post-colonial world counters that of the centre. He is the ironic messenger that stands on the boundaries between different cultures. In this way, he establishes a dialogue between centre and periphery, ego and shadow, Self and Other.

Finally, Davies incites yet another dialogue in *The Cunning Man*, namely the one between postmodernism and postcolonialism. He uses the Native trickster as the basis for the process of postmodernist rewriting, whereas at the same time, this rewriting is in the service of the post-colonial. Davies, then, continually takes up the space between opposites which is so important in this postmodern world. In the next chapter, the middle will be investigated through the perspective of psychoanalytic literary theory.

chapter six
healing the neurotic text

Magic, not psychology, is the stuff of which great stories are made.
(Robertson Davies, *The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks*, p. 274)

It may sometimes seem easy to discuss a literary text in psychoanalytic terms. Ever since its introduction on the scene of literary theory and criticism, psychoanalysis has been a popular way to think about the literary system, and its adherents have – perhaps abundantly – shed their light on numerous texts. The dangers of the rifeness of psychoanalytic criticism include superficiality, reduction and straitjacketing of the dispersive meaning of texts, and a neglect of the specificity of literature. According to Peter Brooks, the basic problem with psychoanalytic literary criticism is that it mistakes the object of analysis, because it usually chooses to deal with the psyche of author, reader and characters rather than with how the text operates (1994:20-22). In other words, in displacing the object of analysis from text to context, it forgets that which is of uttermost importance in the study of literature, namely how language and literary conventions function. Poststructuralists have rightly changed the focus of psychoanalytic literary criticism from context to text: from author, reader and characters to the structure and rhetoric of the narrative. In order to avoid shallowness, fixed interpretations and neglect of literary specificity, this reading of *The Cunning Man* will be concerned with the textual and formal level rather than with the psychoanalytic context.

A psychoanalytical reading may seem out of place in a discussion of *The Cunning Man.* Indeed, the protagonist of the story strongly denies being a psychoanalyst:

> No, no, not psychoanalysis! That marvellous but extremely limited adventure in human understanding behaves as if its patients lived principally in the mind, and as if the patients' coughs and colds and indigestions, arthritis, "bad lower back," tricky heart, asthma, skin ailments, and all the rest of their disquiets were creatures of another realm, to be dealt with by somebody else.
>
> (CM 248)

As has been dealt with in the previous chapter, Jonathan Hullah embraces both psychology and regular medicine in his practice, because he believes that illness results from the mind as well as from the body (see chapter 5, p. 55-57). The ability of healing, then, is not monopolized either by common medicine or psychoanalysis. Davies puts across an equally psychosomatic and somatopsychic perspective in *The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks*. In the excerpt, he satirizes the megalomania of psychology.

> A psychologist once tried to attach great significance to my bad dreams, but I did not play quite fair with him, for I withheld from him one relevant fact *i.e.*, that I never go to bed without having a bite to eat, and my digestion sometimes gives me bad dreams even when I am wide awake. Of course, my nightly snack may merely act as a porter who throws open the gates of my repulsive Unconscious, letting all the bugaboos and hobgoblins out for a frolic, but frankly I don't care. Better a bad dream than no dream at all.
>
> (Marchbanks 7)

Still, psychoanalysis plays a significant role in *The Cunning Man.* The reasons for the insertion of a psychoanalytic chapter in this analysis are triple. First of all, Davies himself was very much interested in psychoanalysis. Second, the text of his last novel simply begs for a psychoanalytic reading: Hullah's characterization as a "Talking Doctor" and the ample references to (mainly Freudian) psychoanalysis clearly invite to scrutinize the textual neurotic symptoms. Finally, turning to textual conventions, the psychoanalytic reading model is interesting in an intertextual interpretation, because it proves to be just another way of looking at intertextuality and how it functions. The structure of this chapter reflects these three questions.

PSYCHOANALYZING DAVIES: A HISTORY OF A WRITER'S INDIVIDUATION

> We must always bear in mind that,
> despite the most beautiful coincidence
> between the facts and our ideas,
> our explanatory principles are none the less
> only points of view.
> (Carl Gustav Jung, quoted in Monk 1982, p. 1)

The Cunning Man, as Davies's last novel before his death in December 1995, presents his work and perspective on literature in the full-blown stage of moving away from his great passion for Jungian psychoanalysis and archetypal theory to a maturity of self-conscious metafictional writing. Davies's infatuation with Jung started on the basis of his passion for psychology in general, of his consequential

reading into Freudian psychoanalysis and of his more mature discontentment with it.

At Queen's University, Kingston, Davies enrolled in several courses in psychology, taught by Professor George Humphrey, who introduced him to Freud (Grant 1994:142). In an interview, Davies lists Freudianism as one of his great enthusiasms before the age of forty. As he grew older, however, he became more and more dissatisfied with Freudian psychoanalysis because of its limited view on reality: "much of [Freud's] thought is violently reductive – the tendency to feel that the sexual etiology of neurosis explains everything" (Davis 1989:77-78). Davies could no longer agree with the reductive assumption that a singular event in childhood could account for a persisting neurosis in later life. Nor could he reconcile himself to the overtone of sex in Freud's work, and to the popular transformations of the Swiss psychoanalyst's model, which were concocted by the public at large and had been instigated by the Freudian school. But the greatest obstacle for him was the place that the artist got in Freudian theory.

> Why is somebody a writer? A Freudian will say, "It is because he had never lost his dread of the pre-oedipal mother." Well baloney! That's not why he's a writer. He must be a writer for some better reason than because he was scared of his mother before he developed his oedipus complex.
>
> (Davis 1989:120)

Following the scorn of many Freudians towards Jung, Davies began reading into the latter. He immediately found out that the Jungian train of thought was much more closely connected to his own than that of Freud. Apart from biographical similarities, also Jung's erudition and wide knowledge of literature appealed to Davies. Although Davies had let go of Freudian psychoanalysis, he had not abandoned the idea of the unconscious, which also Jung takes as the basis of his theory. In contrast with Freud, however, Jung offered Davies an attractive perspective on religion, myth and the role of the artist (Grant 1994:347-353). Davies could not cope with Freud's idea that all creative thinking was the result of individual sexual neurosis, and that religion and myth were essentially the offspring of the individually perverted and repressed, and were consequently to be dismissed as mere illusions. Davies, as a writer, was unable to accept the Freudian view of the artist as a sexually neurotic mind. Instead of the reductive attitude of Freud, Davies found Jung to be very constructive towards myth, legend, literature and religion. The Jungian definition of the task of the artist for humanity suited Davies's position as a writer better.

> And what Jung seems to feel about art is that it is the job of the artist, without being a job in the sense that you can set to work and do it at will, is to dig into a deep kind of consciousness which is shared by a great number of people, and to find in it things which are of much more than personal importance, or individual importance, and to bring it out and make it live or make it vivid to other people. And this is really what art is about.
>
> (Davis 1989:54)

Jung offered Davies the solution in moving from the individual to the collective and from the sexual to something more inclusive.

However, after some time, Davies realised that also Jung could not offer the final answer in defining human personality and mankind. Although Jungianism constituted for Davies a more convincing paradigm than Freud's, it proved to be not the only and definitive way of looking at reality:

> I think it would be a mistake to use anything like Jung's thought or Freud's thought as a sort of mechanism for a novel because, brilliant though the insights of both men are, they never provide a really full or satisfactory explanation for what you encounter and what you see in life.
>
> (Davis 1989:126-127)

As the epigraph to this section makes clear, the latter epiphany was already inherent in Jung's theory and openly acknowledged by the Swiss psychoanalyst.

At the same time as Davies recognized the limits of Jungian archetypal theory and psychology, he was by a number of critics pronounced to be a dull and conservative writer, using past forms of discourse and employing a preachy, authoritative voice. These critics identify his fiction as "grandiloquent, quasi-nineteenth century prose" or "too didactic, too much concerned with developing lessons about life, and with displaying knowledge and expertise, to subordinate the central narrative, the line of purpose in his works, to any speculative process that might seem to weaken its validity" (quoted in Christ 2000:93). Minority writer Clint Burnham connects Davies's supposedly conservative style with his use of "those darn Jungian symbols" (Burnham 1994).

Anyone writing something like this cannot have read Davies's fiction carefully. Unwary critics identifying Davies's texts with conservatism and elitism – both thematically and artistically – lapse into the common mistake of mixing up writer and narrator. They confuse Davies's impressive Victorian beard, mercurial nature and jocose irony with the structuring presence of the narrator in his fiction. The strong voice of the narrator can certainly not be overlooked in his earlier fiction (i.e. his first three books, *The Salterton Trilogy*), but in his later fiction (i.e. from the *The*

Deptford Trilogy onward), narrative omniscience is replaced by multiple viewpoints and questioned through ironic comments on the act of storytelling.

Interestingly, the disappearance of the authorial narrator in favour of metafictional concerns coincided with Davies's loss of faith in Jungian theory as a fixed manual to understand life. His realization of the relativity of all writing made him believe that both his own fiction and the Jungian archetypes of the collective unconscious were unapt for catching reality in a textual net. Consequently, in his later fiction, Davies counters or at least mitigates narrative omniscience and his reliance on Jungian psychoanalysis.

This later fiction is mainly characterized by the use of metafiction as a strategy to destabilize the power of the written word and to put it into perspective. As Patricia Monk points out in her comprehensive study of the Jungian Self in the novels of Davies, the Canadian author already put the transfer from Jung to metafictional and other literary deconstructive techniques on the tracks in the course of *The Deptford Trilogy*. In *The Manticore* (1972), which comes second in the trilogy, a strange discontentment with Jung's writing becomes more obviously apparent.

> Davies is more ambivalent than ever in *The Manticore*, and his ambivalence is made abundantly clear when, in the third section of the novel, Liesl articulates the counter-theory to Jung, which has been present up to this point only as an ironic undercurrent. Through her Davies presents the notion that Jungian theory does not offer the final answer. […] What has hitherto been implicit in the novel, Liesl makes explicit: Jungian psychology is itself illusion. So ironically, Davies' 'engrossing primer' of Jungian psychology undercuts the value of that psychology as a way of comprehending and living life to its fullest human extent.
>
> (Monk 1982:145)

This attitude is reasserted in *World of Wonders* (1975), where "he is too canny to abandon Jungianism altogether, and, although he seems to have dispensed with Jungian trappings, he has not dispensed the central idea of the Jungian self" (Monk 1982: 147). So, even at the end of *World of Wonders,* Davies is unable to reconcile himself to his ambiguity towards Jung. Still, the doubleness reveals something far more important than his inability to either choose the side of Jungianism or to oppose it, namely that he has recognized that Jungian theory is not the definitive way of looking at the world, but only one out of so many versions.

> Finally, Davies' use of myth in *World of Wonders* refutes Faust's complaint that 'knowledge tricks us beyond measure.' By placing the Jungian myth alongside the Magian and the romance myths, Davies declares himself

> outside all three of them. Yet the artistic form of the novel, shaping the three myths into a unified form, itself provides another way of looking at the universe (romantic, Magian, and Jungian) myth. Davies thus demonstrates that myths are merely myths – ways of knowing, and not knowledge.
> (Monk 1982:181)

By analogy, Davies shows that his own myth functions as only one map of the maze of reality. By weakening the authoritative voice of Jung in his work, the Canadian novelist prevents his lapse into solidified preachy writing.

Summing up, it is possible to divide Davies's interest in psychoanalysis into three episodes. First, he was caught by a passion for Freudian thought. Later, Freud's reductive attitude towards art and the role of the artist incited him to make the shift towards the Jungian psychoanalytic strain. Eventually, although Jungian psychoanalysis generally coincided with Davies's view on reality, he also let go of the latter theory, because he was getting informed by the postmodern distrust of metanarratives. Psychoanalytic theory continued to take up a significant position in Davies's later writing, be it in a more humble and metafictional version.

CRISIS FEEDING OBSCENITY: REPRESSION AND PARODY OF JUNG

> I wish psychologists would stop coming out with my notions as if they were new discoveries.
> (Robertson Davies, *The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks*, p. 232)

> But you must not imagine that because I am very interested in Jungian psychology that I live my whole life in terms of it. I just find that it is a fascinating way of looking at the world and at certain problems which occur in the world.
> (J. Madison Davis, *Conversations with Robertson Davies,* p. 121)

On the basis of a history of Davies's affinity with psychoanalysis, it is to be expected that in *The Cunning Man*, the Canadian novelist renounces Freudianism and takes an ambiguous position with respect to Jungian theory. At first sight, this anticipation does not hold true. Indeed, in the novel, there is ample reference to Freud and his theories, while there are no overt allusions to Jung whatsoever.

Freudian concepts such as the Oedipus complex, repression, the unconscious, and the significance of dreams pervade the entire text. Of course, the latter three notions were also taken up by Jung, but in the context of the story, they are approached from a Freudian perspective. In *The Cunning Man*, as with Freud, repression occurs in the act of storytelling and is intimately connected to sexual desire. The storyteller, Jonathan Hullah, feels that he has to withhold information from the journalist Esme Barron. Throughout the story, he tries to pinpoint the

reason of his resistance towards the young woman. Eventually, he states the motives for his hostility: he is madly in love with the attractive and much younger Esme. The same Freudian reading applies to the idea of the unconscious in *The Cunning Man*. It is deeply sexual, and above all individual, in contrast with Jung's belief in the collective unconscious. Hullah's inclination to look at the underside of everything (see chapter 5, p. 75-77), ties the unconscious to the bowels and, more importantly, to the genitals. Finally, the discussion of the interpretation of dreams is at first sight thoroughly Freudian: during their years at boarding school, the young trinity (Hullah, Charlie and Brocky) dream about ravishing beauties, which obviously results in the release of their bodily fluids.

However, the vocabulary which Davies uses to describe their dreams defies the Freudian sexual interpretation. At night, the young Hullah says he is visited by "Lilith the Succubus – Lilith the Old, Old Mother" (CM 63). She is an ambiguous wraith, because "sometimes she came as a melting young beauty […] sometimes the succubus was a repulsive hag" (CM 63). And of course, Davies likes to show off his knowledge of the English literary canon and speaks of Hullah's fancy as the Keatsian "La Belle Dame Sans Merci – yes, that was one of the forms of that dream – love in which man is the victim, the creature who undergoes ravishment" (CM 63). Although the dream is sexual in nature and thus reminds the reader of Freud, Lilith really concretises the Jungian archetype of the Great Mother. The epithet "Old", which Davies adds himself, reinforces the archetypal meaning, as it refers to the ancient nature of the archetype, which has been collectively repressed throughout the centuries. Jung stresses that the archetype of the Great Mother is, like that of the trickster, double:

> All these symbols can have a positive, favourable meaning or a negative, evil meaning. An ambivalent aspect is seen in the goddesses of fate (Moira, Graeae, Norns). Evil symbols are the witch, the dragon (or any devouring and entwining animal, such as a large fish or a serpent), the grave, the sarcophagus, deep water, death, nightmares and bogies (Empusa, Lilith, etc.).
>
> (1972:15-16)

Hullah's fancy similarly shows the oppositional nature which is so central in Jungian thought. In contrast with Hullah and Brocky, the pious Charlie loathes sexuality, and eventually it turns out that he was not visited in his dreams by female figures who embody the archetype of the Great Mother, but by a tempting Jesus, i.e. a Jungian trickster archetype. Also he epitomizes the paradoxical nature of existence (see chapter 5). When the grown-up Hullah and his friend Hugh

McWearie discuss Charlie's problem, they agree that Charlie was not having "your usual erotic dream […] but those things are stupidly underestimated" (CM 450). In other words, the dreams of Hullah and Charlie are not seen as Freudian incarnations of the libido, but they appear in a more mythological and Jungian light.

So, it seems that Davies is exerting a strategy in order to repress Jungian archetypal theory into the dark corners of his text. What is more, he murders – or at least he tries to do so – the pervasive intertext, i.e. Jungianism, on the overt level, and diverts attention from it by forcing the formerly renounced Freudian text as a stepfather into the limelight. Davies's silence on Jung is all the more surprising considering the central place which he gives to the trickster figure in *The Cunning Man.*

The reasons for this scenario of intertextual repression are twofold. First, *The Cunning Man* is situated at the height of Davies's metafictional writing, and thus displays a profound suspicion of metanarratives. However, this does not explain why he puts forward the Freudian intertext. In our culture, Freudian theory also functions as a grand narrative; it even outdoes Jung's archetypes of the collective unconscious as far as popularity is concerned. Above all, Davies eschewed the Freudian intertext much earlier than its Jungian (and more beloved!) contestant. An explanation for Davies's diversion can be found in Harold Bloom's theoretical work.

According to Bloom, the practice of intertextuality in literature is created by a sense of belatedness on the part of the writer. The author feels that he is late for communicating an idea which was put down by a literary forebear. Therefore, he cannot but feel overpowered by a literary father who refuses to leave the stage. Bloom uses Freud's reading of *Oedipus Rex* to illustrate this feeling of belatedness (Allen 2000:133-135). The Oedipal triangle then consists of the mother who symbolizes the idea which has already been written down, the father who needs to be killed for being the earlier writer, and the child that feels literarily belated.

Accordingly, Davies's dismissal of Jung in *The Cunning Man* can be explained by his being late to tell a Jungian story, which he already believed in before reading the Swiss psychoanalyst's work. In fact, Davies's dissatisfaction with Freud motivated him to move on to Jung, and his reading of the latter confirmed his disgruntlement with the former psychoanalyst. As Judith Skelton Grant, Davies's biographer, observes: "Generally he found that Jung's perceptions extended and tallied with his own" (1994:461). The Canadian writer thus felt late to communicate ideas which no longer appeared to be his own, and this accounts – next to a postmodern debunking of grand narratives – for the evanescence of Jung.

Cynthia Sugars points out a similar disappearance of a central literary precursor and its replacement by a surrogate father. In her essay entitled "The Anatomy of Influence: Robertson Davies's Psychosomatic Medicine", she argues that the pervasive but unacknowledged intertext in *The Cunning Man* is Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. In fact, both the writer of *The Cunning Man* (Davies) and the writer in the novel (Hullah) try to gain ascendancy over Frye by performing a misreading of his study and by deviating attention to Richard Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. According to Sugars, Davies mimics Frye in naming his book after Burton's study – the phrase "cunning man" traces back to Burton – without acknowledging Frye's commendation of the Renaissance work. Next, his character Hullah is modelled after Frye's literary detective and psychoanalyst. What is more, Sugars points out that Frye had always, but without success, tried to write a literary anatomy, which Davies achieves in *The Cunning Man*.

Next to Davies, also Hullah acquires dominance over Frye. The title of his *Anatomy of Fiction* shows his indebtedness to the Canadian literary theorist's work. Further, Frye returns in the novel through the character of the scholar Brocky. He is Hullah's direct competitor, both in sexual and scholarly terms: Hullah has an affair with Brocky's wife Nuala, and even claims Brocky's son to be his own. More importantly, Sugars indicates that Hullah's so-called original idea, which feeds his *Anatomy*, really comes from the paper Brocky presented at the Curfew Club (see chapter 4, p. 34).

Finally, Sugars claims that both Hullah and Davies perpetrate a Bloomian misreading of Frye's notion of the author as communal subject: "In absenting Frye from their tradition of literary precursors, Hullah and Davies are able to efface the unsettling implications of his theory (of the communal cultural subject) for the 'authoritative author' " (2000:77). Davies and his character, according to the critic, are guilty of mediating the idea of authorial intention. I agree with Sugars's proposition with respect to Hullah, but I would like to contest it with regard to Davies. As we have seen before (see chapter 4), Davies unmasks the notion of the author as the messenger of stable meaning. He even opposes Hullah in accusing him of "demanding authorities and attributions for everything" (CM 104). What is more, Frye contends that the intentional fallacy, that is, "the notion that the poet has a primary intention of conveying meaning to a reader, and that the first duty of a critic is to recapture that intention", arises from the inability to make a distinction between fact and fiction (Frye 1973: 86). Hullah too is subject to this failure. As Davies has it, Hullah "fall[s] victim to the author's *obsession*, which is that he

relates whatever life presents to him to the book he is writing or plans to write" (CM 408, see chapter 4, p. 38, my italics).

So, both Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* and Jungian theory are denied a spot in the referential framework of *The Cunning Man*, because Davies refuses to feel belated. The central texts of Frye and Jung are consequently pushed off the intertextual stage by surrogate father texts, respectively Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Freudian psychoanalysis.

Next to the repression of Jung through an intertextual Bloomian deviation, Davies employs another strategy to counter Jungian theory. In *The Cunning Man*, he heavily criticizes one of the key concepts of Jungian psychoanalysis, namely individuation. For Jung, individuation implicates running counter to and interiorising the negative drives which the human shadow embodies. Hullah's individuation is triggered, as we have seen, by the Blitz on London. Being trapped in a bathtub, he calls for supernatural help, and thinks of the shaman Elsie Smoke and her snakes. In this passage, Davies draws on archetypal imagery and characterizes Hullah as the superior hero who dares to meet his (professional) shadow, i.e. the native shaman. At the same time, however, Hullah refuses to consider himself a hero.

> Superior? How could I be superior when my mind was invaded by rubbish from the past, and obscenities from student days? I tried to pass the time by recalling mnemonics which had helped me to get through my medical examinations, but for so many the "clean" form gave way to the form preferred by young men in excellent health whose instruction in science and medicine had done nothing to quench their natural lusts – did, indeed encourage them.
>
> (CM 220)

Next, he gives a list of medical terms and a sexually informed variant of it that makes him remember his courses better. Finally, he stresses that a human being cannot always uphold the mask of heroism: "No, I could not be resolutely high-minded, and I now think that to do so would be inhuman" (CM 220).

According to the classification of fictional prose genres as given by Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, the bathtub passage, which presents Hullah partly as a hero, would be labelled romance.

> The romancer does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. It is in the romance that we find Jung's libido, anima, and shadow reflected in the hero, heroine, and villain respectively.
>
> (Frye 1973:304)

According to his friend Darcy Dwyer, Jonathan Hullah is one of those stylised characters: "Beware of style, Jon. You show signs of developing it, and it could be your downfall" (CM 297). In other words, he erects a selective wall around his differentiated identity and in this way he masks his real and plural nature. The doctor then is a stylised hero who dares to fight his shadow.

However, he cannot keep up his heroism, and takes resort to pointless and highly satirized scientific lists. For this reason, Frye would consider the excerpt an instance of the anatomy form. Anatomy, for him, is closely related to Menippean satire: "the digression of air, of the marvellous journey; the digression of spirits, of the ironic use of erudition" (Frye 1973:311). Hullah's heroic and "superior" nature thus clash with the anatomical "rubbish from the past". Significantly, in the literary theory of Frye, the anatomy form is the exact opposite of the romance form (see infra).

The clash between anatomy and romance is all the more obvious in the Annual Bad Breath Contest (CM 175-185). In the passage, Hullah displays his knowledge of the medical issue of halitosis, but in a highly satirical way. He anatomizes the contestants, categorizes their breaths as *fetor oris, pemphigoid stomatitis, pemphigus vegetans, pyorrhoea alveolaris* and what have you, and marks them according to the improvised Hullah Halitosis Scale. His concluding speech is in the manner of the Menippean satire, as he both pours out his knowledge on the subject of bad breath and ironizes it by applying his *drye mock*.

Even if the Annual Bad Breath Contest exhales Davies's mastery of the form of the Menippean satire, some sentences and thoughts are obscenely out of tune with the anatomy form. Because Hullah was set up by Darcy Dwyer to act as a judge in the Contest, he is at first vexed at the whole matter and needs to get his breath. He writes:

> I suppose everybody who has lived above the cabbage level has had these moments when divine, or at least supernatural, aid seems unnecessary, and one calls upon it with an urgency which is as much physical as mental. […] These calls for help from – from what? – are one of the many forms of prayer, and it was here, as judge in the Coburg Social Parlours Annual Bad Breath Contest, that I first experienced prayer as something other than what went on, ritually, in churches and meant nothing to me whatever.
>
> (CM 179)

The excerpt reminds us of the conventions of romance, in which the hero calls for guidelines from above. What is more, Hullah's introduction to the Annual Bad Breath Contest passage is equally romantic in spirit.

> I really must put on the brakes or this Case Book, which I intend only as an aide-mémoire, will turn into one of those German Bildungsromanen, about the growth of a human spirit. Yet I suppose I cannot wholly escape it.
> (CM 175)

The Bildungsroman, or novel of education, which is very much concerned with the individual and its process of individuation, is an instance of what Frye would call the romance form. Hullah's introduction to the passage prepares the reader for an event of individuation, and later clashes with the Contest, which takes predominantly the form of the Menippean satire. Besides, Hullah refers to his study as "Herculean feats of memorization" (CM 175), which shows that Davies again conflates the superhuman romantic hero and the silly anatomical rubbish. The formal short-circuit is all the more obvious when Dwyer and Jock praise Hullah's satirical speech as truly Mephistophelean (CM 185), as the psychological and stylised archetype of the Faustian shadow collides with the Menippean form. The Annual Bad Breath Contest thus shows that Davies keeps himself abreast of generic conventions. Moreover, he openly acknowledges that he "cannot wholly escape it", i.e. the use of conventions, which is exactly the reason why he parodies them by placing highly incompatible forms side by side.

So, Davies presents a conflict between the heroic tone of the romance form and the bad breath of the Menippean satire or anatomy. The Blitz passage and the Annual Bad Breath Contest demonstrate that Davies ironizes the highly stylised, allegorical and Jungian characters of romance. Through an obscene mixture of the profoundly incompatible generic forms of romance and anatomy, Davies presents his readers with a parody of the Jungian collective archetypes and of the idea of the individuation of the Self. This parody, together with the (Bloomian) repression of Jung, squares perfectly with Davies's revision of the relevance of Jungian theory.

CUNNINGLY FAULTY NARRATIVE: THE END OF PARODY?

> Everybody's speech has a tune, and it is always revealing. […] In it the attentive physician's ear discerns the cry of the infant, or the toddler who wants mother to kiss it and make it better.
> (Robertson Davies, *The Cunning Man*, p. 281)

Though the protagonist of *The Cunning Man* denies that he practises as a psychoanalyst, the references to the reading of the psyche cannot simply be put aside. Moreover, the literary critical spin-off of psychoanalysis can shed an interesting light on the question of textuality and intertextuality. This section will

first analyse how the dialogue between patient and analyst, or writer and reader, is established. Then, it will uncover the illness of the patient, i.e. the text. Finally, some tentative conclusions will be drawn about the possibility and the process of (textual) healing.

The text in conversation

Walter Benjamin argues that, since the advent of the novel, the act of oral storytelling has got into hot water. Oral narration rests on a mutual contract between speaker and listener, whereas the written story is decontextualized and impersonal. According to Benjamin, the novel cuts loose its bonds with the author once it has been written and published, so there can be no real communication between writer and reader (Brooks 1994:80-81). Peter Brooks modifies this view, and states that written or printed literature "simulates, or evokes, or carries traces of, the oral storytelling situation" (1994:76). A strategy to foreground the exchange of ideas between writer and reader is to dramatize the narrative situation, i.e. to include the bilateral narrative model of oral storytelling in the written text. In such framed tales, the writer writes about the dialogue between teller and listener.

It is important to note that the positions of teller and listener in oral storytelling are not stative: speaker and listener switch positions as the narrative direction changes. Moreover, the very presence of a listener influences the speaker's narration. In such a dialogic situation, text and truth are continuously revised by both participants in the narrative act. For Benjamin, the perpetuum mobile of oral storytelling eventually leads to wisdom. Brooks extends the latter idea to the novel. From such a perspective, the writer invites the reader to question his own narrative and in this way, they both feed the endless story.

The place of psychoanalysis in this context is obvious. Psychoanalytic therapy is equally oral and draws on the exchange of words between patient and analyst. Freud soon noted that psychoanalysis is not unidirectional and that the patient and the analyst play an equivalent role in the process of healing. In the transference of words, as Freud terms it, meaning arises and the text is continuously revised (Brooks 1994:51-53).

In *The Cunning Man*, the narrative act is put to the fore. Jonathan Hullah's telling of the story is triggered by the presence of a listener, namely the journalist Esme Barron. Hullah and Esme then respectively take up the slots of speaker and listener. Their positions, however, are not privileged. Even though Esme acts as the addressee of Hullah's neurotic words, she sits in the patient's chair of Hullah's

consulting-room (CM 16). She steers the interview and in this way influences Hullah's story. The journalist and the doctor thus constitute the dialogic or transferential situation of narration. The step to psychoanalytic therapy is easily made. Not only is Hullah's medical practice – though it is not merely psychoanalytic – the setting of the interview, Esme and Hullah respectively epitomize the analyst and analysand. She tries to get down to the bottom of the case, while he offers firm resistance to expose what should remain hidden.

The act of storytelling is not only represented in the relationship between Hullah and Esme, but Hullah himself also functions as the reader of the words of other people. His experience in the Second World War led him to believe that a doctor should inevitably be a "Talking Doctor". His healing practice consists in telling stories to his patients and in having them tell him about their mental and physical discomforts. His technique of examination in his later medical practice is based upon this model of dialogue.

> I suppose if I were to describe my method of work I would call it a type of psychosomatic medicine by which I attempt to bring about a change in the disease syndromes through language, and therefore through reason. And sometimes […] in that fibrous darkness below reason.
>
> (CM 247)

Although this sounds very much like psychoanalytic therapy, Hullah denies merely being an adherent of psychoanalysis. The reason for this is that his healing method is both psychosomatic and somatopsychic. He is, however, partly a psychoanalyst. Chips calls him "a horse with a secret sorrow" (CM 239), Hullah refers to himself as a "firehorse" (CM 9) and he lives in renovated stables. His horse-like nature links him to the horse in Henry Fuseli's painting *The Nightmare*, which is also alluded to in the novel (CM 141). The horse can symbolize the psychoanalyst who peers behind the veil into the secluded unconscious of the patient.

Other than with his patients, Hullah engages in a dialogue with himself as well. He insists that a doctor must take his own medicine. His salvation is his Case Book. It gives him the possibility to let steam off his psychic kettle.

> Am I becoming constipated, like my other retentives? I believe I am. Should I take the advice I give them and, instead of resorting to cathartics and blasters of one sort and another, search my mind for the origin of my undue retention? That is what I would advise them to do. Physician, heal thyself.
>
> (CM 118)

Hullah's Case Book has a double purpose. First, he uses it as a tool to analyze himself, both bodily and spiritually. Second, it contains notes for his *Anatomy of Fiction*. His *Anatomy* aims at digging beneath the surface of fictional texts in search of references to illnesses of fictional characters. Hullah's text then establishes a dialogue with its fictional intertexts.

So, the dialogic relation between listener and speaker, and between the reader of *The Cunning Man* and of its writer Robertson Davies, is dramatized in the relation of Esme with Hullah, Hullah with his patient, Hullah (and the reader of his Case Book) with Hullah, and the text with its intertexts.

The madness of the text

Patients of regular medicine and those of psychoanalysis have one thing in common, namely their being ill. In psychoanalysis, patients are cured through language. Typically, their illness influences their language:

> The narrative account given by the patient is riddled with gaps, with memory lapses, with inexplicable contradictions in chronology, with screen memories concealing repressed material. Its narrative syntax is faulty and its rhetoric unconvincing.
>
> (Brooks 1994:47)

The task of the analyst, Brooks argues, is to structure the neurotic narrative and to infuse it convincingly with the proper rhetoric.

Both Hullah's and Davies's discourse are faulty narratives. Hullah's Case Book serves as his psychic outlet, and is thus expected to be the reflection of his neurotic mind. First of all, he cannot control his language: "I really must put on the brakes or this Case Book, which I intend only as an aide-mémoire, will turn into one of those German Bildungsromanen, about the growth of a human spirit" (CM 175). What is more, the grammar and logic of his narrative are failing: "As I reread what I have written I am dismayed by the confusion of tenses and the order of time" (CM 269). Also the structure of his Case Book rejects a coherent story: "So I determined to make a note whenever an idea occurred to me, and to do so in this Case Book, even though the occasional Note for Anat. would interrupt the flow of what was developing into a substantial narrative" (CM 379).

Davies's *The Cunning Man* similarly puzzles its critics and readers. Lynne Diamond-Nigh points out that the novel is "faulted for its rambling quality" (1997:51). The miscellany of the murder mystery and other plots, philosophical

treatments, Chips's letters and Hullah's scrappy Case Book may make reading difficult and tiresome. Still, I would like to argue that *The Cunning Man* is not a badly written novel, and that its fragmentary nature and structural discrepancies precisely constitute a meaningful part of its form. As such, Davies pays tribute to the psychoanalytic intertext.

Next to Hullah's neglect of logic and grammar, Davies defies the rhetoric of narrative. Davies's provocation of rhetoric shows in the mixture of genres in his novel. In the fourth essay of his *Anatomy of Criticism*, which is entitled "Fourth Essay: Rhetorical Criticism", Northrop Frye identifies four forms of prose fiction. The four conventional forms which Frye anatomizes are romance, anatomy, the novel and the confession. Frye categorizes them on the basis of the two axes extroverted-introverted and personal-intellectual.

> The novel tends to be extroverted and personal; its chief interest is in human character as it manifests itself in society. The romance tends to be introverted and personal: it also deals with characters, but in a more subjective way. […] The confession is also introverted, but intellectualized in content. […] The Menippean satire [or anatomy] resembles the confession in its ability to handle abstract ideas and theories, and differs from the novel in its characterization, which is stylized rather than naturalistic, and presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent.
>
> (Frye 1973:308-309)

Frye acknowledges that his anatomy is an abstraction and that there are no easily fixed boundaries between the four forms. Davies goes even further. Although Cynthia Sugars argues that *The Cunning Man* is "a combined anatomy-confession rather than an anatomy-novel" (2000:78), I would like to propose that in this novel, Davies pushes all four Frygian formal conventions towards their limits and finally explodes them. According to Frye, the only literary work that has managed to combine the four forms is Joyce's Ulysses (1973:313-314). Other fictional texts restrict themselves to a combination of only two or occasionally three forms. As has been elaborated above, Davies short-circuits the fictional forms of anatomy and romance, which are each other's antipodes – anatomy being intellectual and extroverted and romance personal and introverted. Davies adds the other two oppositional forms, namely the novel and the confession.

According to Frye, the novel "deals with personality, with characters wearing their personae or social masks" (1973:305). This social element is certainly present in *The Cunning Man*, and is inflated in the Ladies' Sundays, which are gatherings for artists organized by Chips and Emily. In her letters, Chips describes how the artistic society in Toronto functions, and how its members live up to its code. This strongly

reminds one of Jane Austen's use of the conventions of the comedy of manners, which Frye also relates to the novel (1973:304). Further, Charlie's alcoholism and subsequent downfall reprimand him from a novelistic and social perspective. Davies brings up the theme of poverty as well. Finally, Frye states that the novel is always concerned with mankind and its history, in contrast with the romantic passion for heroism and allegory (1973:306-307). *The Cunning Man* similarly deals with the history of the growth of Toronto and Canada and their place in the world. As Hullah concludes his Case Book:

> To have watched my city change from a colonial outpost of a great Empire to a great city in what looks decidedly like a new empire; to have watched the British connection wither as the Brits grew weary under Imperial greatness, and the American connection grow under the caress of the iron hand beneath the buckskin glove – that was to have taken part in a great movement of history. And to have watched the paling of a Chekovian colonial social order, as new values and new heroes supplanted old manners and outworn ideals of heroism.
>
> (CM 468)

But, next to its relation with romance, anatomy and the novel, *The Cunning Man* also bears witness to the confession. The first sentence of the book seems to point in this direction: "Should I have taken the false teeth?" (CM 9). The whole Case Book then turns out to be Hullah's personal justification of his part in the murder mystery. Besides, he continuously investigates the motives for his hiding the full facts of the case from Esme. "My intention was merely to write a few notes, to separate what I thought it prudent to tell Esme from what I know about Charlie and the affair at St. Aidan's, but I seem to be writing an extended memoir" (CM 117). Still, the confession, as Frye defines it, is not only personal, but also intellectual in nature: "Nearly always some theoretical and intellectual interest in religion, politics, or art plays a leading role in the confession" (1973:308). In *The Cunning Man*, the subject of politics is thematically subordinate, but Davies's text is suffused with religious and artistic matters.

To conclude *The Cunning Man*'s sick short-circuit of genres, Davies overwhelms the reader with his erudition by referring to intertexts of the four Frygian fictional prose forms. Romantic intertextual references include *Parsifal*, the Arthurian Legend, sir Walter Scott and Wordsworth. The allusions to classic realist novelists are manifold: Austen, Trollope, Dickens and Dostoevsky are only some of them. Davies pays tribute to the confession in his naming of Montaigne and of Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*. And finally, the anatomy form is present in the intertextual allusions to Voltaire's *Candide*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, Erasmus and Rabelais.

Brocky's passion for *The Funny Papers* is the most obvious reference to the anatomy form: "A full week's issue of hilarity and hard-bitten street philosophy on every one of these sheets. They are not called stereotypes for nothing; they embody what a majority of people believe, or accept as self-evident" (CM 110). This list of discordant intertexts is not exhaustive, for exhaustiveness is not the purpose of an intertextual study, but it should give a hint of the reflection of Davies's mad use of conflicting genres on the set of intertextual referents.

Finally, not only the jungle of mismatched intertexts is a symptom of textual illness, also the intertexts themselves are treated as patients. As one reviewer puts it: "The novel itself becomes a sort of consulting-room in which religion and philosophy [as well as fiction] are diagnosed like fascinating but difficult patients" (quoted in Sugars 2000:75). Hullah earlier recognized the link between medicine and literature: "Hiawatha did not take with me; I did not 'catch' Longfellow as I had 'caught' scarlet fever" (CM 36). The intricate knot of medicine, psychoanalysis and literature allows to view intertexts as patients that need to be deconstructed and healed through dialogue. Just like Hullah insists that patients should be seen in their context (CM 97), Davies believes that texts are not to be cut loose from their social and cultural ideology. Texts can then be ill because they do not reflect the worldview and literary conventions of the time and place in which they are read.

An articulation towards healing

For Walter Benjamin, the dialogic setting of oral narrative eventually leads to wisdom (Brooks 1994:80-81). Peter Brooks takes up this concept in his psychoanalytic reading of (written) storytelling, and contends that the cure is to be found between text and reader, and between the present and the past (1994:14-15). This dialogic model of textual healing as proposed by Peter Brooks and dramatized in *The Cunning Man* is an interesting way of looking at intertextuality. If meaning is not exclusively reserved to the text or the reader, or to the past or the present, then it is inherently intertextual. Significance arises out of the exchange of ideas between the text and its intertext(s). In this way, the intertextual system feeds itself. The text, which comments critically upon its intertext(s), will inevitably become subject to intertextual scrutiny by other texts. So, the space between text and intertext will never be empty.

As has been carefully examined, Robertson Davies acts as a critical reader of other texts. He actively engages the conversation with past texts and with texts that are representative of other cultures. Like Jonathan Hullah, he rereads

intertexts from his perspective and deconstructs them because they no longer seem to fit in his world view. Davies's method of deconstruction, however, is unlike that of Hullah. Hullah merely adds to the intertexts the medical information which he thinks is missing, while Davies uses the force of parody to unmask their inherent contradictions. He flavours the intertext with a touch of parody, which in the end turns out to have a healing effect upon it. In its non-parodical form, the intertext is out of tune with our perception of the world and, more particularly, with our notion of literature and its conventions. Parody breaks down these ill thoughts, reconstructs them from a current perspective, and in this way it heals the intertext (see also p. 89).

Still, the sting is in the tail. Davies accuses his character Jonathan Hullah of developing style, which Davies himself obviously refuses to do. On a metatextual level, Hullah's development of style, which in the words of Dwyer could be his downfall (CM 297), is symbolic of the writer's toolbox of conventions. Style and literary genres presuppose formal closure and dependence on a fixed code. The writer's use of generic conventions eventually will turn against him, as other writers will parody his work. Conventions only exist to be overturned in the end.

The Cunning Man persistently denies labelling by pitting dissonant genres and intertexts against each other. Davies's mixture of genres defies not only fixed meaning and interpretation, but also hampers possible parody of his writings. Davies, being a somewhat self-willed writer, blocks off potential parody of *The Cunning Man* by conflating literary genres and forms within one novel. Of course, this generic blending is in itself also conventional, but its miscellaneous nature makes parody difficult. The faulty narrative of Davies's final novel then is cunningly faulty, and seems to put an end to parodical intertextuality, at least as far as parody aims at Davies's work. *The Cunning Man*, which embraces bodily, spiritual, and textual health as a principle, then paradoxically impedes being treated as a patient, or at least it proves to be a very difficult one. Davies seems to be unwilling to apply Hullah's humble maxim, namely that a physician must take his own medicine, to himself. Just like Hullah contends that his *Anatomy of Fiction* "will keep the whole critical trade at work for at least a couple of centuries" (CM 376), Davies seems to indicate that he refuses to be forgotten and that his work will change the literature of his day for quite a long time. However, as the cunning Grand Old Man of Canadian letters, he is wary of the fact that this claim is somewhat overconfident, and in this way, again, he cuts off his critics.

> "How can you see when I haven't told you anything? – Oh, I understand. I read your look, my old friend. You think I've gone mad."
> "Well –"
> "Delusions of grandeur? Inflation of the ego? Something like that?"
>
> (CM 376)

However, all in all *The Cunning Man* promotes the idea of textual healing through the medicine of parody. By using and abusing past texts, Davies awakens the critical Bakhtinian dialogue between text and intertext, and shows that the content and form of past texts need not necessarily be old-fashioned when they are given the critical attention they deserve.

chapter seven
conclusion

> I hate books with Messages. […] The real author, in my view, is the one who approaches his hearers with a Golden Tale.
> (Robertson Davies, *The Merry Heart*, p. 61)

Linda Hutcheon once called Canada a nation of doubleness (1991:82). In this dissertation, I hope to have shown that also Robertson Davies and his work breathe out the paradox of Canadian identity. In the third chapter, I made use of Hutcheon's theory of intertextuality in order to define 'paradox' as a division between the use and the abuse of past texts and of texts that belong to other ideologies. Typically, this definition of intertextuality, also known as parody, carries historical, social and cultural meaning. Parody neither gives primacy to the use nor to the abuse of the intertext. The paradox of parody, then, consists in the incorporation of the intertext and in the simultaneous subversion of it. This paradox is eternal, for artistic conventions, as well as cultural relations, are ever-changing. In the fourth chapter, I pointed out that metafiction equally embodies a paradox. In *The Cunning Man*, fact and fiction at once clash, and blend in with one another through the self-commentary of metafiction. The fifth chapter combined the paradoxes of parody and metafiction, as it demonstrated how the novel self-consciously ponders over its parodical practice. In this context, Davies adduces the key figure of the trickster as the paragon of the paradox of parody. In the sixth chapter, finally, I first uncovered Davies's paradoxical relationship with psychology, after which I considered the never-ending critical dialogue between the text and the reader, and between the text and the intertext.

In the course of analyzing how intertextuality is used in *The Cunning Man*, I refuted the negative criticism which Davies sometimes received. I have unmasked Davies's supposedly conservative writing style as an illusion, by showing that he not only uses the conventions of the European literary canon, but that he subverts them in order to write back. This parody serves both postmodernist and post-colonial concerns. In *The Cunning Man*, Davies questions the representational capacities of language and literature, and fits this in with a postmodern ontology. Next to this, he puts Canada on the map of English fiction, and gives a voice to the Canadian Other, namely the Indian, by casting the Native North American trickster

as the basis of the practice of rewriting. *The Cunning Man* shows that the epithet ‘Grand Old Man of Canadian Literature’ does not establish Davies as a high-brow conservative or as an elitist writer, but as an internationally renowned novelist, who was, at the age of 81, still in command of all his wits. As he himself put it: “true creativity in old age does not appear in mediocrities” (*The Merry Heart*:303).

appendix

WHY ROBERTSON DAVIES DOESN'T MATTER, by CLINT BURNHAM

A philosopher once said, "woe to the country that needs geniuses, prophets, Great Writers, or demiurges!" Why does Canada suddenly need to drool over Robertson Davies? An old white writer dies, yet another mediocre and ponderous symbolist and it's as if everyone has to worship at the altar of Robertson Davies, Tory author. What with all the provincial bickering, constitutional crises and separatist boredom, Canada's chattering classes - the journalists, literary pundits, CBC types, Liberals and Tories alike - needed something to agree on. The coverage has been just obscene: last week they broadcast his funeral on CBC-FM Radio! It's a high-brow version of a royal dying. Yeah, no kidding.

(The latest chapter in this great Canadian love-in came in the form of an article by Michael Valpy - monarchist and red tory - in the Globe and Mail this week. Here he luxuriated over the live broadcast of a memorial service: "Mr. Findley was brilliant, exquisite. Mr. Fulford was at his most insightful, surely English-speaking Canada's finest cultural essayist." And then he went on about how beautiful Margaret Atwood is. I'm sorry. Who gives a fuck?)

Dust off the obits - it's time for the Globe and Mail Report on Robertson Davies. The businessman's novelist - thick Coles notes. The central Canadian literati were tripping over each other to trowel on the genuflections. Robertson, uh, I mean Robert Fulford shared a page in the Globe with Douglas Gibson, who is only Davies' publisher. It'd be kind of like David Geffen eulogizing Kurt Cobain - but in this case everyone can be solemn and sombre but tastefully so. Hey, this is literature we're talking about here guy! (And who cares if Kurt is important to more people than Davies was-is? Only the over-literate could dispute this anyway.)

But that's the point - because literature is supposed to be high class, the writers at the top come to Represent The Nation. Well, if they're white they get to. I don't remember Caribbean-born Austin Clarke or Trinidad-born M. Nourbese Phillip or Rohinton Mistry being thought to represent Canada. Thus Davies and co. are national icons, like Atwood, "another literary icon" as the Southam story reminded us last week. And you can bet they don't mean one of those icons you click on. Naw, nothing so crass.

Lest this seem too crude or unfeeling, I'd argue that we're not talking about the actual person Robertson Davies - but rather what he came to symbolize. This was made possible in part by his writing - by how it offered this old-fashioned, "literary" (i.e. those darn Jungian symbols) but also "accessible" (he was anti-Modern but certainly not postmodern) fiction. But he was also as a person given to full and exuberant expression of an appropriately conservative philosophy - anti-women, elitist, and dedicated to a foreign class system from another time (Edwardian or even Victorian England). Well, of course that is the favourite time of all sorts of conservative Canadian intellectuals - from John Fraser (now master at Massey College, sure indicator of a central place in the Canadian intellectual establishment) to Michael Coren (who seems almost invisible out here, thank god, compared to his omnipresence the past three or four years in Toronto).

Davies' support comes from liberals like Fulford, Atwood, and Carol Shields, of course, because essentially these writers don't differ a lot on literary questions from the conservatives. Atwood may be a feminist and Shields supports - in a nice way - women's writing, but let's face it, this is Robertson Davies we're talking about. He went to Oxford you know. One of those colleges. And he edited a newspaper his dad gave him. Sure he didn't notice local labour trouble, but you know, he was kinda like an Orson Welles character. Hell, it's hard not to get cynical - the whole lit scene is sewn up tighter than a, well, than a rosebud. Davies books sold well and were obviously "literary" - and they talked about small Ontario towns and people come to Toronto to see what he wrote about! Just like, you know, Jane Austen or something! So of course they had to be "good" literature, and all the major critics have duly caved in and demonstrated with their critical readings that, yes, Davies is great lit, a classic already, even postmodern - once the pomo types are done with him.

Indeed, the eulogies seemed to be about showing his appeal even if those darn workers and black people couldn't understand him. A waitress thought he was Santa Claus (one obit even made his wearing a beard heroic - jeez! it's not like he had a nose-ring or anything), and the biggest gaffe one publicist apparently did was to send him to a black radio station to talk about his book! Yeah, no kidding. There aren't a hell of a lot of black Jungians - all that talk about the "dark shadow."

Of course this is hardly new - I don't want to seem like someone walking into a casino in Las Vegas and saying "hey, there's gambling going on here." But the literati seem content to pretend, No, it's about Excellence! Sounds like one of those total quality management mantras. But the structure's already there, the elite

pyramid of Literary Talent, like the obits already written so you can just add details of death and push into print.

And actually, you can see this in an article published last month in This Magazine, the Toronto socialist rag. There, Kevin Connolly astutely pointed out the way the most venerated of Canadian writers are over-praised by literary journalists. You know, all that talk about literary "seasons" and the heavy hitters. I wonder if any Much Music crews prowled around the University of Toronto campus to get mourning responses from English majors.

The whole reaction - Schadenfreude - is just so typical of Canadian deference, as well. Gibson tells a story of some publishing kiddies awed into silence by Davies - wow, man. We Canadians can just be so fucking deferential and authority-sucking. Especially the middle classes. Just to give you an example: I penetrated the Goretex Curtain here in Vancouver on the weekend, journeyed west of Main Street and entered a bookstore in beloved Kitsilano. There I heard the owner or whatever going on about the Davies CBC broadcast - Findley was great, Bob Fulford. Bob Fulford! Give me a break. Later I was back on the safe side of town, East Van, in the multicultural grunge that is Kingsgate Mall. What does Robertson Davies, dead or alive, have to do with the people here?

Not a hell of a lot.

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