

# Fifth business by robertson davies: the jungian archetypes

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## **Jungian Archetypes in Fifth Business**

In Jungian psychology, archetypes are highly developed elements of the collective unconscious. Some of the archetypes described by Carl Jung are the Self, the Shadow, the Anima and Animus, the Devil, the Wise Old Man and Virgin Mary. In his novel, *Fifth Business*, Robertson Davies addresses the meaning of life by exploring Jungian archetypes. The novel explores the life of the narrator, Dunstan Ramsay. The novel describes the implications of one single moment, which forces the characters over the next sixty years to confront their personal devil. The characters in *Fifth Business* resemble important archetypal characters of Jungian psychology. Liesl, Paul's business partner resembles the Shadow's archetype. Also, Padre Blazon, a member of the Jesuit Bollandistes, the group who welcomes and aids Dunstan in his European saint research, has traits which resemble the archetypal Wise Old Man. Moreover, Mary Dempster, Paul Dempster's mother and Dunstan's saint represents the archetypal Sacred Feminine or Virgin Mary. Thus the Jungian archetypes used in *Fifth Business* by Robertson Davies play a major role in the shaping of the characters in the readers' minds.

Out of all the archetypal characters in *Fifth Business*, Liesl plays a very important role by helping Dunstan to get rid of his guilt. Dunstan Ramsay carries the weight of Paul Dempster's premature birth on his shoulders his entire life. It is only because of Liesl, an extremely elegant and intelligent woman confined inside a deformed and gigantic body, Dunstan experiences happiness and ultimately a life well lived. Liesl's surname is "Vitzliputzli", which means "devil". In Jungian terms, one's "devil" refers to one's shadow,

the “suppressed part of the personality, the dark or more primitive side of the consciousness.” Thus, Liesl represents Dunstan’s shadow, all that he suppresses from his ego; all that he hides from the world. According to Jung, an “ego which refuses for long to recognize the existence and force of its shadow is inviting disruption.” Therefore, the shadow invades the consciousness until the conscious recognizes the opposing force and comes to terms with it. This is one way of coming to know one’s self. This is why Liesl is the most influential and important mentor, because she challenges Dunstan to stop suppressing his shadow so he can find out and come to terms with who he is. “But you – there is a whole great price of your life that is un-lived, denied, set aside. That is why at fifty you can’t bear it any longer and fly all to pieces and pour out your heart to the first really intelligent woman you have met – me... This is the revenge of the un-lived life, Ramsay. Suddenly it makes you a fool... You should take a look at this side of your life you have not lived... But every man has a devil... you must get to know your personal devil.” (Davies, 217). It is clearly evident from the quote that Liesl wants to change Dunstan for the better and from the revenge of the un-lived life when she tells him to come to know his devil. She asks Dunstan to “shake hands with [his] devil” (Davies, 213). Liesl understands Dunstan much better than anyone else and she forces upon him many self-realizations, which help Dunstan to get rid of his guilt regarding Paul’s premature birth that he has been carrying on for a long while. Thus Liesl is Dunstan’s shadow and the archetypal Shadow who helps Dunstan with his life.

Another important archetypal character described in *Fifth Business* is that of the Wise Old Man, which is portrayed by Padre Blazon. Padre Blazon functions in Dunstan's personal groups of archetypes as the image of the Wise Old Man. He is present for a reason, to aid Dunstan in his quest for wholeness. Padre Blazon, in his knowledge and and experience, is one of the wisest characters in the novel. Padre, just like Liesl, forces some self-realizations into Dunny. Dunstan receives not only religious advice, but also spiritual and psychological advice. Blazon asks Dunstan to analyze Mary Dempster. "Who is she in your personal world? What figure is she in your personal mythology?" (Davies, 169). "If you think her a saint, she is a saint to you...That is what we call the reality of the soul; you are foolish to demand the agreement of the world as well" (165). He makes Dunstan realize his mistake. He makes him realize that he does not need the agreement of the world to prove that Mrs. Dempster is a saint to him. "I think you are a fool to fret that she was knocked on the head because of an act of yours. Perhaps that was what she was for, Ramezay.... Maybe God wants you for something special. Maybe so much that you are worth a woman's sanity" (169). Through this, Blazon attempts to diminish unjustified guilt that Dunstan has been carrying with him for so long. In turn, Blazon supplies Dunstan with another vital piece of advice that serves as a fundamental stepping stone to Dunstan's wholeness. Forgive yourself for being a human creature, Ramezay. That is the beginning of wisdom; that is part of what is meant by the fear of God; and for you it is the only way to save your sanity" (170). He tells Dunstan to forgive himself for being human. Thus Padre Blazon is the Wise

Old Man of Dunstan's life, who guides him religiously, spiritually and psychologically.

Mary Dempster is one of the most intriguing characters in the novel. Mary Dempster resembles the archetypal Sacred Feminine- the figure of a woman who resembles the Virgin Mary. She is saintly and pure at heart. She is described as pure due to the three miracles she performs in the novel- the first one being the transformation of the tramp. " He was very civil ...he wanted it so badly"(Davies, 48). After the affair with the tramp, the tramp changes his life for the better and spends his life in the service of others. She also appears in the battle field, before Dunstan goes into a coma. "...

Crowned Woman in Revelation- she who had the moon beneath her feet and was menaced by the Red Dragon. But what hits [him] worse than the blow of the shrapnel was that the face [is] Mrs. Dempster's face."(Davies, 70). She appears on the battlefield and perhaps it is because of her that Dunstan's life is saved. Also, Mary Dempster brings back Willie, Dunstan's brother from the mouth of death, which is a miracle. " For [him], Willie's recall from death is, and will always be Mrs. Dempster's [third] miracle."(Davies, 56). As evident from the quote, Dunstan finds Mary's actions to be miracles. Thus Mrs. Dempster resembles the Virgin Mary who is pure and saintly, performing miracles to improve other people's lives.

Thus Davies, in Fifth Business, uses Jungian archetypes in order to shape his characters. Liesl- the Shadow, Padre Blazon- the Wise Old Man and Mary Dempster- the Sacred Feminine are just a few examples of the Jungian archetypes portrayed in the novel. There are a lot more such examples like

Diana, the Mother figure and Boy Staunton, the Trickster. Therefore, jungian archetypes have an important place in the novel, Fifth Business.